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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India eyes tariff cut on $23B US imports

India wants to avoid Trump's tariffs from 2 April, which will hit exports worth $66B

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Indian government is open to cutting tariffs on more than half of US imports worth $23 billion as part of a trade deal being negotiated between the two countries, Reuters reported, citing two government sources.

This will be the biggest cut in years, aimed at fending off reciprocal tariffs.

Under the deal, India is open to reducing tariffs on 55 per cent of US goods it imports that are now subject to tariffs ranging from 5 per cent to 30 per cent, said both sources.

India wants to mitigate the impact of US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs set to take effect from 2 April, a threat that has disrupted markets.

As per the report India may cut tariffs on almonds, pistachios, oatmeal, and quinoa. However, India has set clear limits for the negotiations. It will not reduce tariffs on meat, maize, wheat, and dairy products.

Tariffs on automobiles, which currently exceed 100 per cent, may be lowered gradually rather than through an immediate cut.

According to an internal analysis by India, the new US tariffs could impact 87 per cent of Indian exports to the US, which are worth around $66 billion, Reuters reported.

Overall the US trade-weighted average tariff has been about 2.2 per cent, data from the World Trade Organization shows, compared with India's 12 per cent. The United States has a trade deficit of $45.6 billion with India.

A US delegation, led by Brendan Lynch, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, is scheduled to visit India for trade talks starting Tuesday.

The Indian government is trying to finalise a deal before the US reciprocal tariffs come into effect. The two sides are also expected to hold negotiations to firm up a framework for a bilateral trade pact that would address issues relating to levies and market access. —*PTI*

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During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's US visit in February, the two nations agreed to start talks towards clinching an early trade deal and resolving their standoff on tariffs ***PHOTO: ANI***

INDIA ENDS 6% GOOGLE TAX ON FOREIGN DIGITAL ADS FROM 1 APRIL

PHOTO: FREEPIK

India is likely to remove the 6 per cent equalisation levy, often called the "Google tax," on online advertising services provided by foreign tech companies amid Donal Trump's reciprocal tariff threat.

This will benefit tech giants such as Google, Meta and Apple. The removal is said to be part of amendments to the Financial Bill, 2025 under the equalisation levy on online advertisements.

The levy which was introduced in 2016, focused on tax payments made by Indian business for digital advertising services by foreign companies. Lowering the cost of advertisements on these platforms is likely to encourage more spending on ads by Indian business as well as improve profitability of foreign tech companies.

Cong to fight Bihar polls as part of INDIA bloc

GUWAHATI, 25 MARCH

Firming up its strategy for the upcoming Bihar assembly polls, the Congress on Tuesday said it would contest the election as part of the INDIA bloc and asserted that the alliance partners would take a "collective decision" on the chief ministerial face. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge chaired a meeting at the Indira Gandhi Bhawan in Delhi that was attended by former party chief Rahul Gandhi, Bihar Congress president Rajesh Kumar and his predecessor Akhilesh Prasad Singh, AICC's Bihar in-charge Krishna Allavaru, Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal, senior leaders Meira Kumar, Tariq Anwar, Shakeel Ahmed Khan and Mohammad Jawed, among others. —*PTI*

Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Lok Sabha passes Finance Bill 2025

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Lok Sabha has approved the Finance Bill 2025, along with 35 amendments proposed by the government, notably including the removal of a 6 per cent digital tax on online advertisements. This marks a significant step in the Budgetary approval process, with the Bill now set to be considered by the Upper House, the Rajya Sabha. Upon its approval, the Budget process for the financial year 2025-26 will be concluded.

The Union Budget for 2025-26 outlines total anticipated expenditure of Rs 50.65 lakh crore, reflecting a 7.4 per cent increase from the current fiscal year. The proposed capital expenditure is pegged at Rs 11.22 lakh crore, with an effective capital expenditure of Rs 15.48 lakh crore. The gross tax revenue is estimated at Rs 42.70 lakh crore, accompanied by projected gross borrowing of Rs 14.01 lakh crore.

According to the Budget documents, Rs 5,41,850.21 crore is allocated for Centrally Sponsored Schemes for the financial year commencing 1 April 2025, compared to Rs 4,15,356.25 crore for the current fiscal year. Meanwhile, central sector schemes have received an allocation of Rs 16.29 lakh crore for FY26, an increase from Rs 15.13 lakh crore in 2024-25.

The upward revision in expenditure estimates for 2025-26 is attributed to rising interest payments on market loans and increased funding for the Armed Forces and employment generation schemes. The fiscal deficit for FY26 is projected at 4.4 per cent, down from 4.8 per cent this fiscal year, while GDP for FY2025-26 is estimated at Rs 3,56,97,923 crore, showing a robust growth of 10.1 per cent over the revised estimates for FY2024-25. —*PTI*

Canada accuses India of poll interference

OTTAWA, 25 MARCH

India has the "intent and capability" to interfere in Canadian elections and democratic processes, a media report said quoting a top Canadian intelligence officer.

Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) deputy director Vanessa Lloyd also claimed that China, Russia and Pakistan too could interfere in the federal election campaign.

Lloyd was addressing a media briefing Monday on efforts to protect the integrity of the general election, voting for which takes place on 28 April.

Lloyd said China is highly likely to use tools enabled by artificial intelligence (AI) to interfere in the federal election campaign and "highly likely to turn to social media to promote narratives favourable to its interests", the news channel said.

Lloyd also alleged that Russia has tried to build "dissemination networks" across social media and news websites that amplify Kremlin talking points.

Meanwhile, quoting unnamed sources, The Globe and Mail alleged Tuesday that agents of India and their proxies meddled in the 2022 election of Pierre Poilievre, a Conservative Party leader.

Quoting a source with "top-secret clearance", it said that the CSIS learned that Indian agents were involved in raising money and organising within the South Asian community for Poilievre during the leadership race, which he won.

The relations between India and Canada plummetted to a new low after former Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau alleged in September 2023 that India was behind the killing of Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a charge trashed by India. —*PTI*

WITH EID COMES FASHION TIME

A woman and a child shop for bangles at a market ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr, in UP's Bikaner on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

NO JOKES ALLOWED

COPS SUMMON KAMRA FOR ROASTING SHINDE

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

Stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra has been issued a notice by the Mumbai Police following allegations of derogatory comments directed at Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister, Eknath Shinde. Officials have requested Kamra to appear before the Khar police in connection with the ongoing investigation into the case registered against him. Kamra has sought a week's time to appear before the police.

The 36-year-old comedian has sparked significant political controversy in Maharashtra after satirising Shinde's political trajectory during his performance. In a parody of a popular Hindi song from the film 'Dil Toh Pagal Hai', Kamra reportedly referred to Shinde as a "gaddar" (traitor) and made jibes regarding recent political upheavals, including the splits in Shiv Sena and the NCP.

In response to Kamra's performance, members of Shiv Sena vandalised the Habitat Comedy Club in Khar, where the show was held, as well as a hotel situated on the same premises. An FIR has been filed against Kamra too. —*PTI*

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PHOTO: PTI

Carry ID at all times: UN to staff in New York

UNITED NATIONS, 25 MARCH

Amidst increased scrutiny of immigrants under the Trump administration, the United Nations in has asked all staff members to carry their UN IDs as well as copies of passports with G4 visas in the eventuality that they may be required to show a form of identification if stopped by authorities in New York. When asked if this has ever happened before, Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said, said "Not in my memory." The note said that while the likelihood of a situation requiring UN staffers to produce such documents to confirm their identity "remains low, we want to ensure that everyone is prepared." It also added if anyone is detained and requires support, they should contact relevant UN authorities. —*PTI*

GARBAGE PILE UP ALERT

City garbage collectors threaten strike ahead of festivals

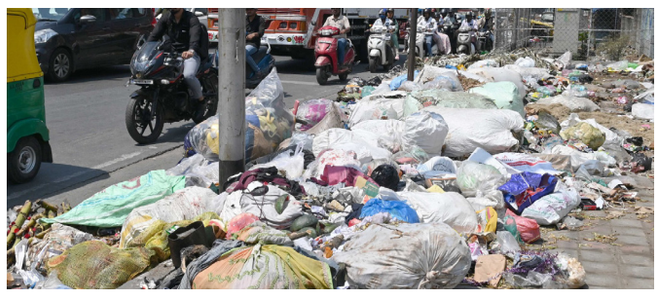
BENGALURU 25 MARCH

The City is staring at a potential garbage crisis as thousands of garbage collection vehicle drivers are planning an indefinite strike from Wednesday to press for their long-pending demands.

If the strike goes on as planned, Bengaluru could once again witness heaps of uncollected waste piling up ahead of the Ugadi and Eid-ul-Fitr festivals.

If the protest is not withdrawn, around 4,000 garbage autos, 700 garbage trucks, and 2,000 tipper vehicles will cease operations, bringing waste collection in the city to a grinding halt.

Speaking to Salar News on Tuesday, members of BBMP Pourakarmika Sangha expressed frustration over unfulfilled promises by the Congress Government to implement the IPD Salappa Committee report which recommends regularising over 10,000 workers and permanent employment status for drivers and helpers and inclusion of contract labourers under direct wage workers. They claim that despite Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's assurances, no action has been taken. —Salar News



City could see heaps of uncollected waste ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

ATM WITHDRAWAL CHARGES TO INCREASE FROM 1 MAY

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved an increase in ATM interchange fees. Customers will now have to pay an additional Rs 2 per transaction once they exceed their free withdrawal limit. The non-transaction fee has also been raised by Rs 1. As per the new charges, withdrawing cash from an ATM will now cost Rs 19 per transaction, up from Rs 17. Similarly, checking account balances at ATMs will now cost Rs 7 per transaction instead of Rs 6. The revised charges will only apply once customers exceed their free transaction limit. Currently, the limit is set at five free transactions per month at other banks' ATMs in metro cities and three transactions in non-metro areas. —*Agencies*

Withdraw PF via UPI, ATM from May

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

In a landmark initiative for India's workforce, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to implement a new system for Provident Fund (PF) withdrawals via Unified Payments Interface (UPI). The Labour and Employment Ministry has approved this recommendation from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

Speaking exclusively to ANI, Sumita Dawra, Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, stated that PF members will soon be able to withdraw funds through UPI and ATMs by the end of May or June this year. Members will be able to view their PF account balances directly on UPI and withdraw up to Rs 1 lakh instantly, selecting their preferred bank account for transfers.

The EPFO has significantly expanded withdrawal options for purposes such as housing, education, and marriage, alongside existing provisions for sickness. Dawra highlighted that the organisation has made considerable progress in digitalising processes, integrating over 120 databases to streamline withdrawals, which has reduced claim processing time to just three days, with 95% of claims now automated.

Pensioners have also benefited from recent reforms, now enjoying increased flexibility in withdrawals from any bank branch. With over 75 million active members, the EPFO continues to grow, reinforcing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "ease of living" for all employees. —*ANI*

Wife, her mom held for realtor's murder in City

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Days after a 37-year-old real estate agent was found murdered near an under-construction building in BGS Layout, his wife and mother-in-law were arrested in connection with the crime. Yashasvini, 19, and her mother, Hema Bhai, 37, were arrested on Monday for the murder of her husband, Lokanath Singh, on 22 March. Yashasvini had married Singh a few months ago. However, she later discovered his extramarital affair and moved back to her parents' house. Yashasvini allegedly laced Singh's food with sleeping pills and when he started losing consciousness, her mother allegedly stabbed his neck two to three times with a knife. —*PTI*

Fake SSLC, PUC marksheet racket busted in City

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The City Crime Branch (CCB) sleuths have busted a fake marks card racket operating under the name of the "Karnataka State Secondary and Higher Education Board". They arrested three persons for issuing counterfeit SSLC and PUC marks cards. The accused have been identified as Prashanth Gudumi, 41, from Dharwad, Monish, 36, from Banashankari and Rajashekhar Ballari, 41, from Gadag. The accused duped students by claiming that their academy was a recognised institution. They charged Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 per candidate and issued more than 350 fake mark cards. Several departments, including the Transport Department, Passport Office and Child Welfare Department, flagged these documents for verification, triggering a probe. The case came to light after Mirza Inam, a resident of Palace Guttahalli, lodged a complaint on 2 December. —***Salar News***

Bidadi railway station gets hoax bomb threat

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Panic gripped Bidadi Railway Station on Tuesday morning after an anonymous caller threatened to detonate a bomb on the premises. Bomb disposal squads, sniffer dogs, and bomb detectors were deployed to sweep the station premised for any explosive devices. Ramanagara Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) Mohan, along with railway officials, conducted a thorough inspection of the station for more than five hours. Later, Mohan confirmed that no explosives or suspicious material was found, suggesting that the call was a hoax. Authorities are investigating the origin of the call, and whether it was intended to create panic or disrupt railway operations. —***Salar News***

PHOTO: SALAR

Youth4Jobs hosts mini job fair in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Despite the Karnataka Bandh on 22 March, Youth4Jobs successfully organised a Mini Job Fair at their Bengaluru Centre, attracting 150 students. Following an orientation, 14 employers participated, resulting in 80 candidates receiving temporary offer letters. The event saw participation from top companies including Muthoot Finance, Reliance Retail, and HDFC, with candidates from City, North Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The diverse group included individuals with various disabilities, such as locomotor disability and cerebral palsy. Youth4Jobs, founded by Meera Shenoy, continues to bridge the gap between persons with disabilities and the corporate world. —***Salar News***

Rajanna submits report to HM over 'honey trapping'

HM says it is not a complaint but a representation

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said the government will decide on the course of action and nature of the probe into the alleged "honey trap" attempt on Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna, after consulting legal experts and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

The statement came after Rajanna submitted a representation to Parameshwara seeking necessary action.

Noting that he cannot receive the complaint, as it should be given at the police station, he said what Rajanna has submitted to him can be considered as a representation or a plea.

Responding to a query on Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court, he said, "We don't know what the court decides. We won't wait for it and we will proceed independently for now."

Asked why the police did not file a suo moto case in this matter, he clarified the issue was raised in the Assembly, and therefore there should have been directions from the Speaker to take action.

Last Thursday, Rajanna had informed the Assembly that honeytrap attempts were made on him and that at least 48 politicians across parties had fallen victim to such schemes.

The issue created a stir in the Assembly, prompting the Home Minister to announce a high-level probe, while the opposition demanded a judicial inquiry by a sitting High Court judge.

Earlier in the day, Rajanna told media in Tumakuru that he also wanted strict action against those involved in or supporting such acts of "honey trapping", as he stated that he has detailed everything that happened in a three-page note.

"I have not installed CCTV cameras in my Bengaluru house. If they were there, we could have identified those who came," he said. —*PTI*

Home Minister G Parameshwara said government will decide on the nature of the probe after consulting experts and CM Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: PTI***

WORLD TB DAY

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Tuesday launched the State's adult Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccination campaign, a significant step in India's TB prevention strategy. The campaign was launched at Sir CV Raman Public Hospital, Indiranagar, Bengaluru, to mark World TB Day on 24 March. The campaign will target elderly citizens, individuals with a BMI below 18.5, diabetics, smokers, persons previously cured of TB, household contacts of TB patients, and immunocompromised individuals ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

COURT RESERVES ORDER ON RANYA'S BAIL

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

A special court here has reserved its order on the bail plea of Kannada actress Harshavardhini Ranya alias Ranya Rao in the gold smuggling case until 27 March, following a detailed hearing of arguments from both the defence and the prosecution.

During the proceedings, Rao's counsel Kiran Jawali argued for her release, while the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence's (DRI) lawyer, Madhu Rao, presented evidence suggesting her direct role in the illicit transfer of funds.

According to the prosecution, the actress admitted to using hawala channels to facilitate gold purchases, a claim that strengthens the case against her.

Gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore were seized from Ranya, the step-daughter of DGP-rank officer K Ramachandra Rao at Kempegowda International Airport on 3 March upon her arrival from Dubai. —*PTI*

CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION?

Opposition leader in Assembly R Ashoka with BJP leaders protest against DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

BJP protests demanding DKS' resignation

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The BJP on Tuesday held protests in various parts of the state against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's purported comments regarding changing the Constitution to accommodate four per cent reservation for Muslims in the state.

However, the senior congress leader on Monday denied making any such comments and claimed that he was "misquoted".

Condemning his purported statement, BJP workers and members protested in Mandya, Chikkaballapura, Mysuru and Kalaburagi accusing the State government of practicing "appeasement politics". They sought for Shivakumar's apology and demanded his immediate resignation.

In Bengaluru, protests were held in Basavanagudi, Padmanabhanagar and Rajarajeshwari Nagar.

In Mysuru, the protest led by BJP MLA TS Srivatsa was held in front of Ambedkar statue with protesters chanting "Jai Bhim" and accusing Shivakumar and the Congress party of being "anti-Dalit" and "anti-Constitution".

In Bidar, the BJP workers burnt effigy's of Shivakumar.

In Hubballi, the protest led by BJP MLA Mahesh Tenginkai at city's Sangolli Rayanna Circle saw many hit portraits of Shivakumar with slippers. —*PTI*

Congress protests against BJP's JP Nadda and Union Minister Kiran Rijiju for defaming DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Weak supply lines causing power outages, says KPCL

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The State energy department and the Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL), in a joint press conference on 25 March, said that electricity demand in the state is expected to rise during the peak summer months of April and May. However, they cited the lack of infrastructure as the reason behind the power surge.

KPCL MD Pankaj Kumar Pandey told Salar News, "There is no power shortage – we have enough to meet the demand. The issue lies in 13 transmission lines that face technical limitations. For instance, if a transmission line has a capacity of 20 MVA, it may struggle during peak hours when demand surges. The solution is to upgrade the transmission lines and substations. We are working on this."

The energy department's Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta highlighted this earlier this month, saying, "Although the state has sufficient electricity, the challenge lies in its transmission and distribution."

Salar News tried to contact Energy Minister KJ George for his version, but his phone was switched off, and his office did not provide a response.

About the Gruha Jyoti scheme, Pandey said, "It is not causing any strain. A slight rise in power consumption happens every year as people buy more appliances like air conditioners and fans. We are fully prepared to face peak summer demand." —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BJP alleges ₹15K cr smart meter scam

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The BJP has alleged a Rs 15,568 crore scam in the procurement of smart meters by electricity supply companies (ESCOMs), including BESCOM. The opposition party said the government violated guidelines and manipulated tenders to benefit select firms.

Addressing the media on Tuesday, former minister Dr CN Ashwath Narayan, along with MLAs SR Vishwanath, Saptagiri Gowda and S Harish, alleged that the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) guidelines do not mandate smart meters for new consumers, but BESCOM and other ESCOMs made them compulsory.

The BJP also alleged that the tender process violated the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement (KTPP) Act by favouring Rajashree Electricals, which lacked the financial capacity required to bid.

"The tender valued at Rs 1,920 crore was awarded at Rs 107 crore, raising suspicions of under-pricing. Besides, UP-based BCITS, blacklisted in its home state, was awarded a software contract here," Dr Narayan said.

BJP leaders claimed Karnataka was overcharging consumers for smart meters. They said consumers would end up paying Rs 17,000 per meter over 10 years, whereas in other states, the costs range from Rs 7,400 to Rs 9,260 per unit.

BESCOM MD Dr N Shivashankara said smart meters are mandatory for new and temporary connections and optional for existing consumers. He said the total cost for 10 years will be Rs 13,920, not Rs 17,000. —*Salar News*

GOVT ANNOUNCES RS 668CR RELIEF FOR FARMERS

KALABURAGI, 25 MARCH

Farmers in Kalaburagi district, who were unable to grow crops during this scorching summer received a breath of fresh air with the state government announcing a total compensation of Rs 667.73 crore under crop insurance and crop loss schemes, said Priyank Kharge, Minister for Rural Development.

Kharge said it is a record disbursement of crop insurance relief by the State government. A total of 2,04,073 farmers in Kalaburagi district, who cultivated tur dal, green gram (moong), black gram (urad dal), soybean, cotton and other crops, enrolled in the 2024–25 Kharif season for the crop insurance scheme have been sanctioned Rs 575.194 crore as insurance compensation. —*Salar News*

PRICES DOUBLE

Pvt bus fares soar ahead of Ugadi, Eid

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

As the festive season of Ugadi and Eid-ul-Fitr approaches, private bus operators in Bengaluru have hiked ticket prices significantly. With a three-day holiday beginning on Friday night, many who had planned to head home for the celebrations are fuming.

People booking their tickets to destinations, including Hubballi, Dharwad, Belagavi and Mangaluru, have reported price surges, with some service providers doubling or even tripling the charges.

The fare for a Bengaluru–Dharwad journey, which typically costs between Rs 600 and Rs 1,100, has now surged to as high as Rs 5,500.

Passengers expressed outrage over the sharp fare hikes, accusing private operators of exploiting the festive rush.

Neeraj K, from Shivamogga said, "Usually tickets cost Rs.500–600. But the prices have now more than doubled to 1,300."

Nataraj Sharma, president of the Private Bus Owners' Association, defended the fare hikes. "We have only increased fares by 50 to 60 per cent, not double. The state budget this year has made no provisions for private bus operators. Road taxes, insurance and prices of new buses and spare parts have increased. Even we need to make a living," he argued.

PHOTO: PTI

Destination	Regular Fare (in Rs)	Fare as on 25 March
Davangere	450-1,300	750-5,500
Dharwad	600-1,100	1,069-5,500
Hubballi	475-1,100	1,200-4,200
Belagavi	389-1,200	1,129-5,500
Mangaluru	650-1,300	1,200-4,500
Kalaburagi	750-1,000	1,200-2,200
Raichur	650-990	1,100-2,990
Hassan	463-1,000	750-1,600
Yadgir	699-900	1,300-2,200
Shivamogga	500-990	1,199-1,800

The transport department warned private bus operators and online ticketing platforms against overcharging. A control room has been set up for passengers to report exploitation, with helpline number 9449863459.

Additional Commissioner (Enforcement) C Mallikarjuna said, "Strict action will be taken against operators who do not comply with the warnings, including suspension of permits or cancellation of registrations." —*Salar News*

11-year feud ends in double murder in Yadgir

YADGIR, 25 MARCH

The murder of a Dalit leader and his associate near Sadyapur village in Yadgir by two separate gangs was the result of a long-standing enmity, which started 11 years ago over a dispute related to a woman, investigations have revealed.

The police have arrested three suspects – Shivappagouda, Huseni and Mohammad Riyaz – in the case registered at Bhimarayanagudi police station.

The double murder took place on 16 March near Sadyapur Cross. The victim, Mapanna, was killed by a gang while he was getting a haircut.

Shivappagouda, a resident of Aralahalli, had reportedly been involved in a dispute with Mapanna since 2014. Mapanna had exposed an illicit relationship of Shivappagouda, which led to a community justice meeting (Nyaya Panchayat). That same year, Shivappagouda allegedly hired rowdy-sheeter Huseni to kill Mapanna.

In 2014, Huseni's gang tried to shoot Mapanna near Bhimarayanagudi, but he narrowly escaped. Following this, attempts were made to kill Mapanna three more times. In 2019, Mapanna's gang retaliated by attacking Huseni, intensifying their rivalry.

Mapanna regularly visited Bhimarayanagudi on Sundays. On the day of the murder, a gang followed him in a car while he was on his bike. They knocked down his bike, threw chilli powder into his eyes, and stabbed him to death. —*Salar News*

Army denies claims of China hacking plane

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Indian Army has dismissed allegations on social media that one of its Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) was "hacked" by the Chinese military. In a statement, Army sources urged media outlets and social media users to avoid spreading "unverified" and "misleading" information. The claims suggested that an Indian Army RPA had strayed into Chinese territory and was allegedly compromised by Chinese hackers. However, the Army has firmly stated that these assertions are "completely baseless and factually incorrect," affirming that "no such incident" has occurred. *—PTI*

12 MLAs suspended for playing gongs in Odisha Assembly

BHUBANESWAR, 25 MARCH

Odisha Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy on Tuesday suspended 12 Congress MLAs for seven days over "indiscipline" in the House. The Assembly witnessed chaos on Tuesday as opposition Congress and BJD members played gongs and raised slogans while protesting over various issues, forcing Speaker Surama Padhy to adjourn the proceedings five times till 4pm. Congress MLAs have been agitating in the Assembly over the alleged rise in the crimes against women since the beginning of the second phase of the Budget Session on March 7. The BJD, on the other hand, protested the alleged failure of the state government to ensure safety of women and justice to the ST, SC and OBC people. This led to the suspension of the 12 MLAs. *—PTI*

2 MP cops give 'VIP' treatment to jailed BJP worker

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 25 MARCH

Two police personnel were suspended in Maharashtra's Beed district on Tuesday after a video showing a local BJP worker, arrested in a case of assault, receiving a special treatment went viral, officials said. Beed Superintendent of Police (SP) Navneet Kanwat suspended the policemen after watching the video. The video showed Bhosale sitting on the ground outside the Beed district jail and eating. As he gets up, a person in civilian dress is seen pouring water on his hands. A group of eight to ten people is standing around him and he is talking to them without any interference from the police. A local official told PTI that the video seemed to have been shot before Bhosale was sent to jail. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kalyan Banerjee calls Shivraj Chouhan 'dalal'

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee has accused Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan of acting as a "dalal" (broker) for the affluent, criticising the Union government for delaying central funds to West Bengal. During a press briefing outside Parliament, Banerjee claimed that payments for vital schemes like MGNREGA and PMAYG had been pending for the past three years, alleging that the Centre is discriminating against West Bengal following the BJP's failure to secure a government in the state. Banerjee's comments elicited a swift response from Minister of State for Agriculture Bhagirath Choudhary, who demanded an apology for Banerjee's "derogatory" language. He contended that the West Bengal government has altered the names of central schemes and engaged in corruption. *—PTI*

Shinde claims Kamra took 'supari' to speak against him

Kamra says he will not apologise, criticises venue's vandalism

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde described Kunal Kamra's comments against him as "taking supari" and said there should be a limit to free speech.

Shinde told BBC Marathi on Monday, "There is freedom of speech. We understand satire. But there should be a limit. This is like taking a 'supari' (contract) to speak against someone."

On the Shiv Sainiks vandalising the studio, Shinde said: "Action causes reaction. I will not speak much on this. I do not justify vandalism."

Meanwhile, Kamra said he will not apologise for the joke. "I will not apologise. What I said is exactly what Ajit Pawar said about Eknath Shinde I don't fear this mob & I will not be hiding under my bed, waiting for this to die down.

"Our right to freedom of speech and expression is not only to be used to fawn over the powerful and rich even though today's media would have us believe otherwise. Your inability to take a joke at the expense of a powerful public figure does not change the nature of my right. As far as I know, it is not against the law to poke fun at our leaders and the circus that is our political system."

The controversy stems from Kamra who parodied Shinde's career through a song and called him a traito in a comedy show *PHOTO: PTI*

The controversy stems from Kamra who parodied Shinde's political career through a song and called him a "traitor" in a comedy show. The joke did not go down well with members of the Shiv Sena, who vandalised Habitat Studio, the venue where the show was held. Kamra on Monday was asked to apologise by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. *—PTI*

"I demand that such platforms which promote hate speech or create tension in society should be banned.
- Dhairyasheel Mane, Shiv Sena MP

"I know Kamra. We share the same DNA. He is a fighter. He won't apologise. If you have to act against him, you have to take recourse to lawful steps.
- Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP

"The DNA of Kamra and Raut could be the same. Kamra is mad and so is Raut.
- Yogesh Kadam, Maharashtra Minister of State for Home

"If they can write, I'd say write literature or comedy scenes in films. Abusing in the name of comedy, mocking our scriptures in the name of comedy, making fun of people, mothers and sisters is not right.....The demolition of my office was illegal, this (vandalism) is absolutely legal
-Kangana Ranaut, BJP MP

"Was her (Kangana Ranaut)house vandalised. Did goons enter her premises? Did they do this to challenge her freedom of expression or for alleged FSI violations? Please enlighten me. Maybe I don't know the facts
-Hansal Mehta, Filmaker

13% personal tax collection target realistic: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the Finance Bill 2025 provides unprecedented tax relief, and the 13.14 per cent projected growth in personal income tax collection is "realistic" and supported by solid data.

In the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said the customs duty rationalisation announced in the Budget will support manufacturing units, domestic value addition, promote exports, facilitate trade and also provide relief to the common people.

Sitharaman said the Budget also provides "marginal relief" under the Income Tax law for those taxpayers whose income exceeds Rs 12 lakh per annum.

"The Finance Bill provides unprecedented tax relief to honour taxpayer," Sitharaman said. "For the year 2025-26, the personal income tax collection is projected at Rs 13.6 lakh crore. The Revised Estimates for 2024-25 is Rs 12.2 lakh crore. So, Rs 12.2 lakh crore is going to be Rs 13.6 lakh and this is done with a certain realistic calculation. So, the projected collections for income tax for 2025-26 are based on solid data."

Talking about Customs tariff rationalisation, she said the Budget 2025 aims to boost domestic production and enhance export competitiveness by reducing duties on raw materials and inputs.

"Many Indian exports will become more competitive as the cost of imported inputs reduces," Sitharaman said.

"The government is actually restoring that which was accepted in March 2008...the sixth pay commission recommendation," she said, adding that discussion around the Income Tax Bill will be taken up in the monsoon session of the Parliament. *—PTI*

Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Cong gives Rijiju privilege motion

Congress whip in the Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore Tuesday gave a notice to move a breach of privilege motion against Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju for "misleading" the House by attributing "false statements" to Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. In his notice submitted to Speaker Om Birla, the Congress MP accused Rijiju of "blatantly misleading" the House on 24 March. On Monday, Jairam Ramesh also gave notices to move a breach of privilege motion against Leader of the House JP Nadda and Rijiju for "misleading" the House.

TN, BENGAL MISUSED MGNREGA FUNDS: CENTRE

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

In a heated Lok Sabha session on Tuesday, Union Minister Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani revealed that Tamil Nadu received more funds under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) than Uttar Pradesh, despite having a significantly smaller population. His statement prompted protests from DMK MPs, who accused the government of bias.

Pemmasani emphasised that the central government has not discriminated against any state, citing instances of alleged fund misappropriation in West Bengal, where an audit uncovered irregularities worth Rs 5.37 crore. He noted that recovery efforts had been partially successful.

DMK MPs caused an uproar over delayed payments, saying Tamil Nadu was awaiting Rs 4,034 crore for five months.

"We sent an audit (team). They found 44 works where there were irregularities. They made full recovery in 34 cases. Still, 10 other works need to be completed. The financial misappropriation was to the tune of Rs 5.37 crore. Out of this, they have recovered Rs 2.39 crore. Some of the things still need to be taken care of," the minister said. *—PTI*

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presents the Delhi Budget 2025-26. AAP called the budget 'hawa hawai' *PHOTO: PTI*

Delhi gets ₹1L cr 'historic budget'

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

In her maiden budget presentation on Tuesday, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta introduced a Rs 1 lakh crore fiscal plan for 2025-26, emphasising ten key areas including women's empowerment, infrastructure, and the cleaning of the Yamuna River.

Gupta, who also oversees the finance portfolio, described the Budget as a "historic" roadmap for self-reliance in the national capital. This marks the first Budget by BJP in Delhi in over 26 years, following their electoral victory over AAP.

The Budget allocates Rs 100 crore for establishing new 'CM Shri schools' in Delhi. Additionally, Rs 750 crore has been earmarked for distributing free laptops to 1,200 students who pass Class X.

In response, AAP leader Atishi branded the budget a "hawa hawai" and claimed it was "baseless and unrealistic," arguing that key allocations to education and health were slashed. She accused the BJP government of avoiding the presentation of an Economic Survey, suggesting it would reveal the true financial situation.

Atishi further criticised Gupta for dedicating much of her speech to attacking the AAP rather than focusing on development, labelling the budget a "smokescreen" designed to obscure the government's shortcomings. *—PTI*

KEY ALLOCATIONS

Capital expenditure doubled to Rs 28,000 crore.

Rs 6,874 crore for health sector, with Rs 210 crore for providing nutrient kits and an allowance of Rs 21,000 to expecting moth-

Rs 5,100 crore for women's welfare: 2,500 per month to eligible women.

Rs 500 crore for Yamuna cleaning.

Rs 696 crore for the development in slum clusters.

Rs 300 crore to combat pollution.

Shift **Tihar Jail** to Delhi's outskirts.

3 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

DANTEWADA, 25 MARCH

A Naxalite with a bounty of Rs 25 lakh on his head was one of three insurgents killed during an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Tuesday.

The clash occurred around 8am in a forest area bordering Dantewada and Bijapur districts while a team of security personnel conducted an anti-Naxalite operation, according to Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai.

Officers from the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Bastar Fighters, both branches of the state police, initiated the operation based on intelligence received.

After the shootout ceased, the bodies of three male Naxalites were found at the scene. Law enforcement officials recovered an Insas rifle, a .303 rifle and explosives from the location.

The operation reflects ongoing efforts by security forces to combat Naxalite activities in the region, which has been a hotspot for such insurgent groups. *—PTI*

Bodies of Naxalites and recovered weapons after an encounter at the Dantewada-Bijapur border, in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh *PHOTO: PTI*

INDIA, CHINA HOLD DIPLOMATIC TALKS

New Delhi, 25 March

India and China on Tuesday held a fresh edition of diplomatic dialogue in Beijing, focusing on ensuring effective border management and early resumption of cross-border cooperation and exchanges including on trans-border rivers and Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra.

In the meeting of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC), the two sides explored various measures and proposals to give effect to the decisions taken during talks between NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Special Representatives dialogue in December. The MEA asserted that peace and tranquillity on the border are "critical" for the smooth development of overall bilateral relations. *—PTI*

With new book, BJP attacks Gandhis on Bofors

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has called for Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi to resign as Members of Parliament until they reveal their connections with alleged Italian middleman Ottavio Quattrocchi, as detailed in journalist Chitra Subramaniam's book, *Bofors Gate*. BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia claimed that revelations in the book were deeply concerning and alleged that Quattrocchi leveraged his ties to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia to influence defence deals.

Bhatia accused Quattrocchi of orchestrating changes to defence files during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure and suggested that his bank accounts were unfrozen by the CBI in 2005 under Sonia Gandhi's directive during the Congress-led UPA government. He described these actions as a betrayal to the nation and questioned whether current Congress leadership, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge, would support the "corrupt" Gandhis. While the Congress has yet to respond to these allegations, Bhatia insisted that until the Gandhis make a full disclosure, they should not hold their parliamentary positions. *—PTI*

US' PARIS ACCORD EXIT

Parl panel bats for better climate efforts

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India, being a major player in the fight against climate change, must take responsibility and align its efforts with other countries following the US exit from the Paris Agreement, a parliamentary panel said in a report on Tuesday.

In its report tabled in Rajya Sabha, the department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change said India should be concerned about climate change as it has a large population.

"The committee is of the view that climate change is a global concern and India, being amongst the most populous countries, needs to be concerned about that... We must cooperate with other countries globally as climate summits after the Paris Agreement have shown slow progress," the 31-member panel headed by BJP Rajya Sabha member Bhubaneswar Kalita said.

"While taking progressive steps, India must correlate her efforts with other countries," it said.

The panel expressed concern over the US administration withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and its impact on climate funding for developing countries.

"Under these circumstances, India, being a large country and a major player in climate change mitigation, must take responsibility and work towards achieving its goals," the panel said.

Since returning to office, US President Donald Trump has withdrawn the US from the Paris Agreement and the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP), a multilateral initiative launched at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 to help coal-dependent developing countries shift to renewable energy. *—PTI*

Panel says India should be concerned about climate change as it has a large population *PHOTO: PTI*

Kerala approves bill for private universities

T'PURAM, 25 MARCH

The Kerala Assembly has passed the Kerala State Private Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Bill, 2025, marking a notable shift in policy for the CPI(M)-led government, which has historically opposed the privatisation of education. The bill was approved by voice vote after extensive discussions on Monday and Tuesday.

Higher Education Minister R Bindu advocated for the bill, addressing proposed amendments and suggestions. Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan expressed conditional support, urging the government to conduct thorough studies to assess the bill's impact on existing public institutions, which have already seen a decline in student enrolment.

Criticism emerged from various quarters, with senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala highlighting impractical requirements for establishing private universities, while KK Rema from the RMP party accused the government of attempting to privatise higher education. Minister Bindu defended the initiative, asserting that private universities would operate under rigorous regulations to enhance public institutions and elevate Kerala's educational standards globally. The Speaker, AN Shamseer, ensured the passage of the bill, dismissing oppositional objections during the session. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Photographer killed over viral Insta picture in UP

BALLIA, 25 MARCH

A 24-year-old photographer, Chandan Bind, was murdered in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh, following the circulation of a married woman's photographs on Instagram, which reportedly angered her family. Two suspects, the woman's brother Surendra Yadav and cousin Rohit Yadav, have been arrested. On 18 March, under the pretext of friendship, Surendra lured Chandan to an isolated agricultural plot, where he and Rohit stabbed him multiple times. Chandan's body was discovered five days later, concealed in a wheat field. Police allege that Chandan had continued to contact Surendra's sister even after her marriage, escalating tensions within her family. —*PTI*

Assault on Colonel: HC seeks Punjab govt's response

CHANDIGARH, 25 MARCH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has ordered the Punjab government to submit a detailed response by March 28 regarding the delay in registering a First Information Report (FIR) in the assault case involving Army Colonel Pushpinder Singh Bath and his son. Colonel Bath alleges that 12 Punjab Police officers attacked them over a parking dispute on March 13-14. He has sought a transfer of the investigation to the CBI, claiming that the local police cannot ensure a fair probe. Despite the seriousness of the incident, an FIR was only registered eight days later. All accused officers have been suspended, and a special investigation team has been assigned to the case. Colonel Bath's family recently lifted their protest following assurances from officials regarding a meeting with the Chief Minister. —*PTI*

Andhra Pradesh to recruit 16,000 teachers in April

AMARAVATI, 25 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday said here that the process for recruiting 16,347 teachers through District Selection Committee examination will begin in the first week of April. Addressing the third collectors conference at the secretariat, the Chief Minister said the teacher recruitment should start in the first week of April and finish with their appointment by the time schools reopen for the next academic year in June. Further, he hinted that the teacher recruitment could incorporate Scheduled Castes (SCs) sub – categorisation under a, b, c and d categories. According to the chief minister, the state has forwarded the one-man commission report of Rajiv Ranjan Mishra on SC sub – categorisation to the Centre and another key stakeholder. —*PTI*

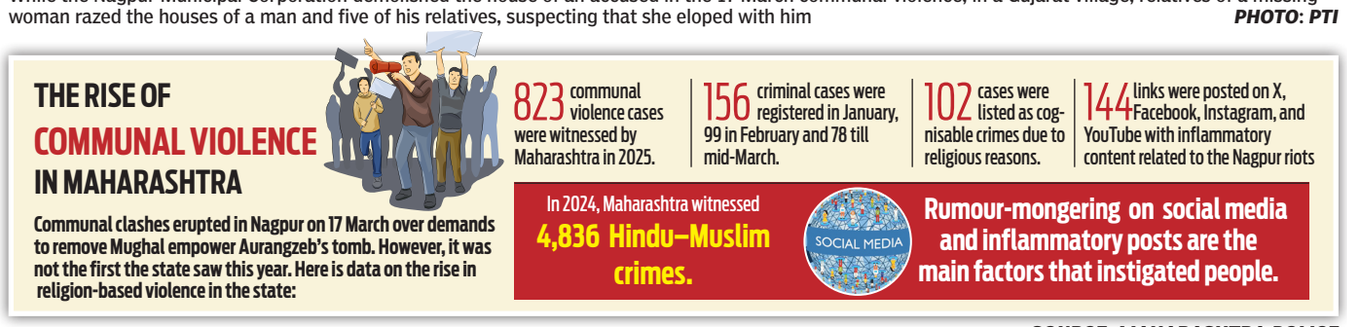
NHRC notice to TN police chief over ex-cop's murder

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Tamil Nadu police chief and the Tirunelveli district collector following the murder of a retired sub-inspector in broad daylight by four assailants. The NHRC took suomotu cognisance after a media report revealed that the victim was an activist engaged in legal battles against Waqf land encroachments and had reportedly received multiple death threats. Allegations suggest that the local police were complicit, failing to act on these threats. The NHRC described the incident as a serious violation of human rights, demanding a detailed report within four weeks regarding police actions leading to the murder. —*PTI*

It's bulldozer revenge: Kin

While the Nagpur Municipal Corporation demolished the house of an accused in the 17 March communal violence, in a Gujarat village, relatives of a missing woman razed the houses of a man and five of his relatives, suspecting that she eloped with him **PHOTO: PTI**


THE RISE OF
COMMUNAL VIOLENCE
IN MAHARASHTRA
Communal clashes erupted in Nagpur on 17 March over demands to remove Mughal empower Aurangzeb's tomb. However, it was not the first the state saw this year. Here is data on the rise in religion-based violence in the state:
823 communal violence cases were witnessed by Maharashtra in 2025.
156 criminal cases were registered in January, 99 in February and 78 till mid-March.
102 cases were listed as cognisable crimes due to religious reasons.
144 links were posted on X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube with inflammatory content related to the Nagpur riots
In 2024, Maharashtra witnessed 4,836 Hindu–Muslim crimes.
SOCIAL MEDIA
Rumour-mongering on social media and inflammatory posts are the main factors that instigated people.
SOURCE: MAHARASHTRA POLICE

Nagpur rioters' kin say razed home was legal

NAGPUR, 25 MARCH

The brother of Yusuf Sheikh, an accused in the 17 March Nagpur communal violence, claimed the civic body started demolition of a portion of their house despite the family having all sanctions and possessing documents for the building.

Ayaz Sheikh said the house of his brother was built legally and alleged that the Nagpur Municipal Corporation's (NMC) action on Monday to demolish its balcony, on the ground that it was "unauthorised", was an act of "revenge".

The demolition was stayed after the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court intervened following pleas by Yusuf Sheikh and Fahim Khan, an alleged mastermind behind the communal violence.

While the two-storey residence of Khan was flattened by civic authorities who claimed it was constructed illegally, the house of Yusuf Sheikh in the Mahal Gate area was spared.

"We had no involvement in the riots and this property belongs to my father and I am the owner since the 1970s. We are law-abiding citizens and Hindus and Muslims stay together here," he said.

"I showed them (civic staff) property documents and sanctioned building plan. They told us to bring the documents to the NMC office in Civil Lines for verification. However, when we went there they refused to take the documents from us," he said.

Ayaz said when the civic body came to know his family has approached the court, the NMC expedited the demotion work. —*PTI*

Six held for demolishing houses over 'elopement'

BHARUCH, 25 MARCH

While governments resorting to 'bulldozer justice' has raised eyebrows, six villagers have been arrested here for allegedly demolishing the houses of a man and his relatives using a bulldozer as he was suspected of eloping with a married woman.

The accused, including family members of the woman vented out their anger using the bulldozer after suspecting that the man, who belongs to another community, had run away with her, Vedach police station inspector BM Chaudhary said. The incident took place at Kareli village in Gujarat's Bharuch on 21 March. The accused used a bulldozer to damage six houses belonging to the Fulmali community, including that of the man, the official said.

The police subsequently registered an FIR against six people, including the bulldozer driver. All the accused have been arrested.

The woman was visiting her parents in Anklav of Anand from where she and the man allegedly eloped. Her parents have filed a complaint. As per the complaint, the accused, including Hemant Padhiyar, Sunil Padhiyar, Balwant Padhiyar, Soham Padhiyar and Chirag Padhiyar, went to the man's house and asked his family members to produce him within two days, after accusing him of eloping with the woman.

At around 9pm on 21 March, the accused went with a bulldozer to the man's house and started razing its portions, including a shed and toilet blocks. They demolished parts of six houses in the area, as per the FIR. —*PTI*

PERCEPTION OF THREAT

SC refuses to lift Unnao survivor's CRPF protection

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to withdraw the CRPF security cover of the Unnao rape survivor, saying there was still a perception of threat.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and PB Varale, however, removed CRPF security cover given to her family members and other witnesses noting that conviction has already taken place.

The top court said the family members and other witnesses would be at liberty to approach local police if they still feel any threat.

During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati submitted that conviction had taken place in the case and sought permission to withdraw the CRPF security cover.

The Centre had moved a plea seeking the withdrawal of CRPF security cover provided to them following the court's order in 2019.

Expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar is serving a life term in jail for raping the minor girl in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao in 2017.

The top court on 1 August, 2019, directed the rape survivor, her mother, other members of the family and their lawyer to be provided security by the CRPF.

All five cases registered in the rape incident were transferred by the apex court from Lucknow to Delhi with directions to a designated special court to hold daily trials and complete them within 45 days.

The apex court also directed the Uttar Pradesh government to provide Rs 25 lakh interim compensation to the survivor. —*PTI*

SC dismisses plea against Tripathi's early release

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Supreme Court has dismissed a petition contesting the premature release of former UP minister Amarmani Tripathi and his wife Madhumani in the murder case of poet Madhumita Shukla. In 2023, the UP prisons department approved Tripathi's release, referencing the state's remission policy from 2018 after he served 16 years. A bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and PB Varale directed the poet's sister, Nidhi Shukla, to approach the relevant high court, questioning the assertion of a violated fundamental right. Madhumita Shukla, who was pregnant, was murdered on 9 May 2003. —*PTI*

SC panel probes cash discovery at judge's home

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

An in-house committee appointed by the Supreme Court has begun investigating allegations surrounding the discovery of cash at the residence of Delhi High Court judge, Justice Yashwant Varma. The three-member team, comprising Justices Sheel Nagu, GS Sandhawalia, and Anu Sivaraman, conducted an inspection at Varma's residence following a fire incident on 14 March. Justice Varma has categorically denied any wrongdoing, asserting that the accusations are part of a conspiracy to damage his reputation. The inquiry was initiated by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna on 22 March. —*PTI*

RG Kar rape victim was under severe stress, says psychiatrist

KOLKATA, 25 MARCH

A consultant psychiatrist has disclosed that the victim of the RG Kar hospital rape and murder was experiencing significant mental distress before her tragic death on 9 August of last year.

Psychiatrist Mohit Ranadip stated that the 30-year-old medical practitioner sought his professional help approximately a month prior to her death, citing long working hours, discriminatory shift allocations, and knowledge of irregularities within the state-run hospital as contributing factors to her acute mental discomfort.

In an interview with a prominent Bengali television channel, Ranadip noted that the victim revealed she was often subjected to 36-hour continuous shifts and faced inequities in duty assignments. He mentioned her concerns about irregular procurement practices related to medicines and medical equipment within the hospital.

Ranadip offered the victim guidance and was expecting her return for follow-up counselling, which ultimately did not occur. The victim's parents and some colleagues have alleged that she faced harassment for exposing these improprieties. —*PTI*

The psychiatrist said the 30-year-old sought his professional help, citing long working hours and discriminatory shift allocations **PHOTO: X**

RARE HEART SURGERY CONDUCTED ON FOUR-YEAR-OLD

GUWAHATI, 25 MARCH

In a significant milestone for pediatric cardiac care in the northeastern region, doctors have conducted the area's first Double Switch Operation, a surgical procedure aimed at addressing a rare heart defect in a four-year-old child.

The six-hour surgery took place at Healthcity Hospital last week, under the leadership of congenital heart surgeon Dr Nayem Raja, with the guidance of renowned surgeon Dr KS Iyer. The medical team comprised skilled paediatric cardiologists, anaesthesiologists, cardiac intensivists, perfusionists, nurses, and technicians.

The child was diagnosed with Congenitally Corrected Transposition of the Great Arteries (CCTGA), accompanied by a ventricular septal defect (VSD) and an atretic pulmonary artery. —*PTI*

Pak illegally occupies J&K territory: India

UNITED NATIONS, 25 MARCH

India slammed Pakistan at the UN, saying the country continues to illegally occupy the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which it must vacate.

These remarks were made on Monday by India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish during remarks at a UN Security Council Open Debate on Advancing Adaptability in UN Peace operations.

"Jammu and Kashmir was, is and will always be an integral part of India. Pakistan continues to illegally occupy the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which it must vacate," Harish said.

Harish's strong retort came after Pakistan raked the issue of Jammu and Kashmir during the UNSC open debate.

Harish said that India is compelled to note that the delegate of Pakistan has yet again resorted to "unwarranted remarks" on the Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Such repeated references neither validate their illegal claims nor justify their state-sponsored cross-border terrorism," Harish said adding that "we would advise Pakistan not to try to divert the attention of this forum to drive their parochial and divisive agenda."

He asserted that India will refrain from exercising a more elaborate Right of Reply.

Relations between India and Pakistan nosedived after India abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution on 5 5 August, 2019, revoking Jammu and Kashmir's special status. —*PTI*

IIT-G scholars use fruit to treat polluted water

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have unveiled a sustainable method for removing pollutants from industrial wastewater, utilising biochar produced from fruit waste. Led by Professor Gopal Das from the Department of Chemistry, the team discovered that biochar derived from pineapple crowns and mosambi (sweet lime) fibres can effectively absorb nitroaromatic compounds, which are frequently found in wastewater from industries such as dyes, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics.

The innovative technique operates within five minutes and is both cost-effective and recyclable. Nitroaromatic compounds pose serious health and environmental risks, with exposure linked to toxicity and cancer. Existing treatment methods often rely on expensive catalysts and complex equipment, presenting significant barriers.

In their research, published in *Chemical Engineering Science*, the team converted organic waste into two types of biochar: ACBC (Ananas Comosus Biochar) and MFBC (Citrus Limetta Biochar). Both proved effective over multiple cycles of pollutant removal, enhancing sustainability and economic viability for industries. —*PTI*

A MONTH LATER

2nd of 8 bodies extricated from T'gana tunnel

NAGARKURNOOL, 25 MARCH

Body of one of the seven people who remained trapped inside the partially collapsed SLBC project tunnel here for over a month was found on Tuesday, officials said.

This takes the total number of bodies retrieved so far to two.

Nagarkurnool district Collector Badavath Santhosh told reporters that the body was found Tuesday morning.

He said "tentatively" the body has been identified to be that of Manoj Kumar, a project engineer from Uttar Pradesh.

As per the instructions of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, an ex-gratia of Rs 25 lakh would be handed over to the family members of the deceased, he said.

The Chief Minister has directed that the search operation should continue till all the persons who were trapped in the accident are located, he said.

Meanwhile, a rescue official said the body was extricated after the search personnel experienced foul smell in the early hours of Tuesday after which it was taken out carefully.

Rescue teams recover one body from inside the SLBC Tunnel, in Nagarkurnool, Telangana **PHOTO: ANI**

A total of eight individuals—including engineers and labourers—were trapped in the Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project tunnel when a portion of it collapsed on 22 February.

The trapped people are as Manoj Kumar (Uttar Pradesh), Sri Niwas (Uttar Pradesh), Sunny Singh (J&K), Gurpreet Singh (Punjab) and Sandeep Sahu, Jegta Xess, Santosh Sahu and Anuj Sahu, all from Jharkhand.

The body of Gurpreet Singh, a Tunnel Bornig Machine (TBM) operator, was recovered on 9 March and handed over to his family in Punjab.

As many as 700 personnel belonging to 25 state, central and private agencies are engaged in the operation to locate the seven persons who remained trapped, officials had said. —*PTI*

PEPPER SPRAY ON PROTESTERS

Police uses pepper spray on protesters in Turkey as thousands rally against the arrest of Istanbul's mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a prominent opposition figure and key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. To disperse the protesters, police is using tear gas, water cannons and also firing plastic pelleys at them in Istandbul, Ankara and Izmir. In retaliation, protesters hurled stones, fireworks and other objects at riot police

PHOTO: PTI

India's power demand to surge by 10% in summer

A worker at an electrical appliances shop sells desert coolers, durables and fans ***PHOTO: PTI***

India should prepare for a nine to 10 per cent growth in peak electricity demand this summer with the country expected to experience more heatwaves, experts have warned. Last year, the all-India peak electricity demand crossed 250 gigawatts on 30 May, which was 6.3 per cent higher than projections.

Climate change-induced heat stress is one of the key factors driving electricity demand. Currently, industries, households and agriculture account for 33 per cent, 28 per cent and 19 per cent of India's total electricity consumption, respectively. Household electricity demand has grown the fastest over the past decade, according to Disha Agarwal, Senior Programme Lead – Renewables at the Delhi-based think tank Council on Energy, Environment and Water. The share of household electricity consumption increased from 22 per cent in 2012-13 to 25 per cent in 2022-23. Much of this rise can be attributed to economic growth and the increasing need for cooling due to rising temperatures, experts say.

In the summer of 2024, room air conditioner sales surged by 40 to 50 per cent year-on-year amid record-breaking temperatures, Agarwal said. "India must now brace for extended heatwaves and a peak electricity demand growth of 9-10 per cent. However, our analysis shows that this peak demand will only last for a short period," she added.

Agarwal said India's electricity consumption has been growing at about nine per cent annually since 2020-21, compared to five per cent per year in the previous decade. The Central Electricity Authority had estimated that electricity demand would grow at a rate of six per cent per year from 2022 to 2030. At the "Global Heat and Cooling Forum", organised by the Natural Resources Defense Council last week, experts raised concerns about the increasing demand for air conditioning as summer temperatures continue to rise.

Abhas Jha, Practice Manager, Infrastructure Resilience Policy and Finance for South Asia at the World Bank, said that under a moderate emissions scenario, the number of heatwaves in India is expected to triple. "India is set to become the largest market for air conditioners globally. Every 15 seconds, an air conditioner is sold in India. AC penetration in the country is currently around eight per cent compared to 90 per cent in developed nations," he said.

"AC penetration in India is going to increase. The problem is that most of these air conditioners are highly energy-inefficient -- three-star or unstarred, or unbranded ACs that consume a lot of energy. And if we continue on this trajectory, forget 1.5 degrees Celsius, even two degrees Celsius is off the table," Jha said. A few years ago, the International Energy Agency projected that energy demand from air conditioners would triple by 2050, equivalent to adding 10 new air conditioners every second for the next 30 years.

"In spite of that rise, two to five billion people will still lack access to air conditioners in 2050," said Rishika Khosla, Research Director of the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development at the University of Oxford. She said ongoing research has shown that in a world two degrees Celsius warmer than pre-industrial times, the largest cooling demand, in terms of total population, will come from India, followed by China, Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, the Philippines, and the US.

Khosla said achieving thermal comfort for everyone without harming the planet is possible. This will require a strong focus on passive cooling methods, energy efficiency and phasing out harmful refrigerant gases. These measures can reduce cooling-related emissions by 66 per cent, with the remaining reductions coming from decarbonizing the electricity grid, she said Oxford researcher added that thermal comfort is not just about temperature. It also involves humidity, ventilation, radiant temperature, and clothing insulation. "Solutions go beyond just switching on one technology," she said.

India experienced an exceptionally harsh summer last year, recording 536 heatwave days, the highest in 14 years, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Official data showed that during one of the hottest and longest heat waves, India recorded 41,789 suspected heat stroke cases and 143 heat-related deaths. This year, heatwave arrived much earlier than last year.

IMD has forecast above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures across most parts of the country during the summer season which extends from March to May. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Children liken Roblox to online gambling

Roblox is one of the world's most popular online platforms for children, offering a variety of "experiences" including games and virtual spaces. Most of the experiences are free, but offer upgrades, bonuses and random items in exchange for cash.

In new research, we interviewed 22 children aged seven to 14 and their parents from November 2023 to July 2024. Some 18 of the 22 played Roblox.

In the interviews, we gave children an USD 20 debit card to spend however they liked, to help us understand children's decision-making around spending. While four children purchased non-digital items with their debit card, 12 children made purchases in Roblox.

We found children greatly value their Roblox purchases – but complain of "scary" and complex transactions, describe random reward systems as "child gambling", and talk of "scams" and "cash grabs", with the platform's inflexible refund policy providing little recourse.

What is Roblox? Created in 2006, Roblox bills itself as "the ultimate virtual universe that lets you create, share experiences with friends, and be anything you can imagine".

There are 380 million monthly active users globally. Around 42 per cent of Roblox players are under 13 years old. In 2024, a study found Australian players aged four to 18 spent an average 137 minutes a day on it.

Roblox has come under fire in recent years, particularly for the prevalence of grooming and child abuse on the platform. Despite parental controls, many feel that it's still not doing enough to protect children. Much of Roblox's USD 3.6 billion revenue in 2024 was generated via in-game microtransactions, particularly through purchases of its virtual currency Robux.

It's free to play Roblox. But Roblox and Roblox creators make money via in-game purchases. In Roblox experiences, players can purchase all sorts of things – cosmetic items to change the appearance of player avatars, functional items to use in games, and passes which give access to games or VIP experiences.

Lootboxes were banned for users under 15 in Australia in 2024.

However, we found many of Roblox's most popular games still have random reward mechanics for sale to accounts under the age of 15.

In response to questions from The Conversation, a Roblox spokesperson wrote: As a user-generated content platform, we provide our developer community with tools, information and guidelines that apply to aspects of gameplay within their games and experiences, including the recent classification update relating to paid random items. We take action on reports of developers not following guidelines or not using our tools properly to meet local compliance requirements.

Concerns about children's digital game spending often focus on the idea that engaging with random reward mechanics might later lead to problem gambling.

While this remains the subject of ongoing research, our research shows Roblox's spending features already harm children now, children already feel misled or deceived.

Many of Roblox's most popular games, such as Adopt Me!, Blox Fruits and Pet Simulator 99, include random reward features. Players can purchase items of random rarity, and can often use or trade these items with other players.

One child in our study explained that playing these games is "literally just child gambling". Random reward mechanics are confusing for children who may not have a strong understanding of statistics or risk. This caused conflict in the families we spoke to, when children were disappointed or upset by not receiving a "good" reward.

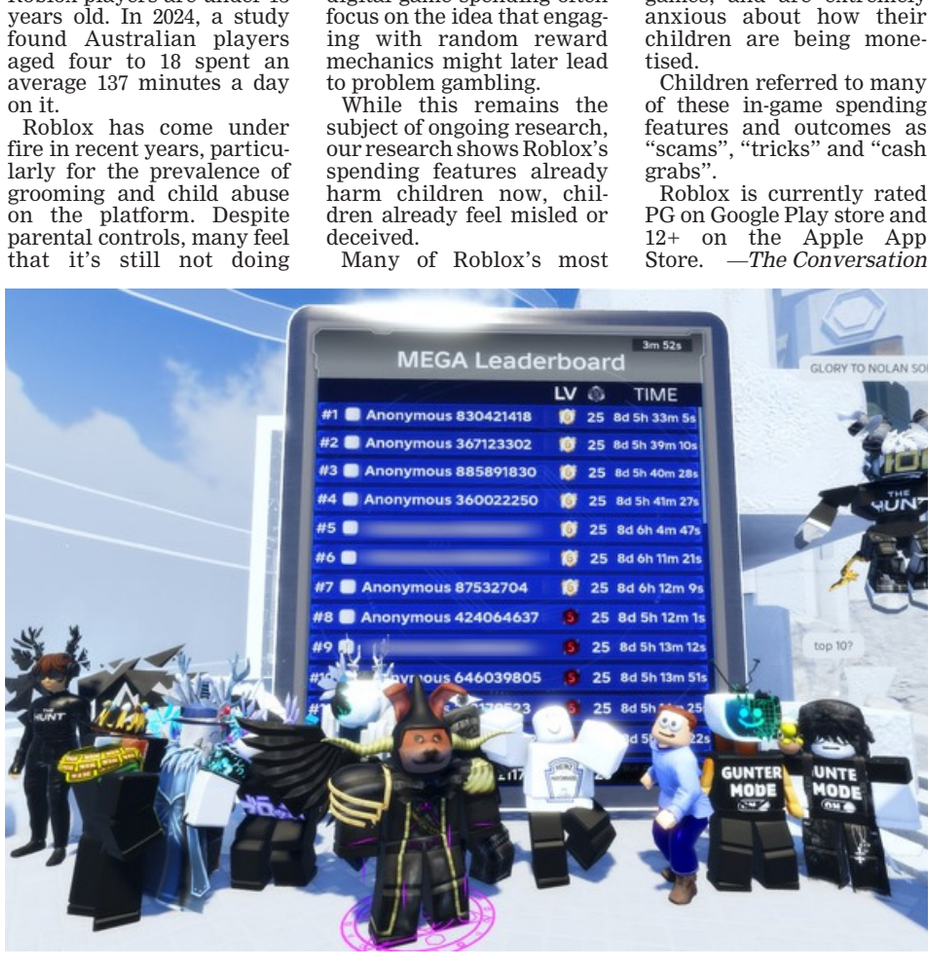
Some popular Roblox games then have their own virtual currency. Players must first convert real-world money into Robux, then convert the Robux into a game's currency of "diamonds" or "gems".

Some children we spoke to had sophisticated ways to handle these conversions – such as online Robux calculators or mental maths. However, other children struggled. Virtual currencies make it difficult for children to discern the true price of items they want to buy in digital games.

This leads to children spending more than they realise in games – something that concerns them. Our interviews also found tat parents feel lost navigating the complexities of these games, and are extremely anxious about how their children are being monetised.

Children referred to many of these in-game spending features and outcomes as "scams", "tricks" and "cash grabs".

Roblox is currently rated PG on Google Play store and 12+ on the Apple App Store. *—The Conversation*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GLORY TO NOLAN
top 10?
GUNTER MODE
UNTE MODE

Despite parental controls, many feel that it's still not doing enough to protect children ***PHOTO: X @DAVIDBASZUCKI***

Foreign students fear deportation over political views in Trump's US

Since plunging during the COVID-19 pandemic, international student enrollment in the US has been rebounding — a relief to American universities that count on their tuition payments. Two months into the new Trump administration, educators fear that could soon change. Unnerved by efforts to deport students over political views, students from other countries already in the US have felt new pressure to watch what they say.

A PhD student at the University of Rochester from South Asia said it feels too risky to speak about LGBTQ+ causes she once openly championed or even be seen near a political demonstration.

With reports of travel bans circulating, she likely won't fly home for the summer out of fear she would not be allowed back into the US.

"You're here for an education so you've got to keep moving forward on that end," said the student, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of being targeted by authorities.

"But also it's very hard to, say, OK, I'm at work. I've got to zone out. I can't be thinking about the news.'"

Educators worry it's a balancing act that will turn off foreign students.

As the US government takes a harder line on immigration, cuts federal research funding and begins policing campus activism, students are left to wonder if they'll be able to get visas, travel freely, pursue research or even express an opinion.

"It has a chilling effect," said Clay Harmon, executive director of American International Recruitment Council (AIRC), a membership organisation focused on recruiting and enrolling international students.

"Even if there's no direct consequence or direct limitation right now, all of this cumulatively produces an impression that the US is not welcoming, it's not open or that you may be in some kind of danger or jeopardy if you do come to the US."

During a recent trip to India, the biggest sender of students to the US, the consensus among recruiting agencies was that far fewer of that country's students are interested in American colleges than in recent years, Harmon said.

Some students are waiting to see how policy changes will play out, while others already have deferred admission offers for fall 2025, he said.

Student social networks are active, and news about immigration-related developments in America — like a Republican proposal to prevent Chinese students from studying in the US — spreads quickly.Students in Canada, China, India and elsewhere have been seeking answers and advice on Reddit and other social media sites, wondering whether to move forward with US plans, or choose a college in the United Kingdom, Germany or elsewhere in Europe. International students are coveted as an antidote to declining domestic enrollment and source of full-price tuition payments.

Unnerved by efforts to deport students over political views, students from other countries already in the US have felt new pressure to watch what they say ***PHOTO: PTI***

In the 2023-2024 academic year, 1.1 million international students at US colleges and universities contributed an all-time high USD 43.8 billion to the nation's economy and supported more than 378,000 jobs, according to data released by NAFSA, an agency that promotes international education.

> As the US government takes a harder line on immigration, cuts federal research funding and begins policing campus activism, students are left to wonder if they'll be able to get visas, travel freely, pursue research or even express an opinion.

International graduate students also play a large role in advancing research, said Fanta Aw, who heads NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Aw said universities must work to remind prospective students that detentions like those of a pro-Palestinian activist Columbia University and, more recently, a scholar at Georgetown University, still are not the norm, despite the attention they receive.

"We have international students at lots of universities," she said, and news coverage has focused on consequences for international students at just a couple of colleges.

"So we have to also put into perspective the fact that the vast majority of students are in universities where we're not hearing anything."

The messaging from colleges and universities on the changing political climate has varied. Some, including Northeastern University in Boston, have responded to Trump's directives with webpages to keep current and prospective students informed.

"Our global community will continue to be a welcoming place for admitted students from all corners of the world," spokeswoman Renata Nyul said via email.

Others have gone further. Bunker Hill Community College in Boston has suspended its one- to two-week study abroad programs, citing concerns about potential travel restrictions.

Administrators at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism have warned students who are not US citizens about their vulnerability to arrest or deportation.

Brown University has advised international students and staff, including visa holders and permanent residents, to postpone travel after a Brown professor was deported to Lebanon despite having a US visa.

Homeland Security officials later said she "openly admitted" to supporting a Hezbollah leader and attending his funeral. *—PTI*

Indian sentenced in Lanka over match fixing

COLOMBO, 25 MARCH

An Indian national was on Tuesday sentenced to four years of rigorous imprisonment by the high court in the central town of Matale in connection with a 2024 case of fixing a cricket match. Yogi Patel was charged under the Prevention of Sports Related Corruption Act based on a complaint by Upul Tharanga, chairman of Sri Lanka selectors, over a proposal to fix matches in the Legends League T20 tournament played in Kandy. Patel, who was tried in absentia as he had fled the country despite a travel ban by the court, was arrested in March last year and later released on bail in May under strict bail conditions. After he fled the country, his lawyers told the court that he had fled due to death threats. *—PTI*

Samsung co-CEO Han Jong-hee dies of cardiac arrest

SEOUL, 25 MARCH

Han Jong-Hee, a senior Samsung Electronics executive credited with elevating the company's television business, died Tuesday, the company said. He was 63. Han, a co-chief executive who oversaw the company's consumer electronics and mobile devices businesses, died at a hospital after being treated for a heart attack, Samsung said. Han joined Samsung in 1988 and spent most of his career in TV-related divisions, during which the company became the world's leading TV manufacturer. He was appointed co-vice chairman and CEO in 2022. Samsung, one of the world's largest technology companies, has dual strengths in components and finished consumer products. Jun Young Hyun, the semiconductor chief executive, will now take over Han's duties. *—PTI*

Thousands evacuated as fires ravage S Korea

SEOUL, 25 MARCH

At least 11 other people have been injured by wildfires around South Korea since last Friday that forced more than 5,400 to evacuate from their homes and damaged or destroyed more than 150 buildings, according to the country's Ministry of the Interior and Safety. South Korean firefighters on Tuesday appeared closer to containing the largest wildfires in the country's southeastern regions, after the blazes fuelled by dry winds burned more than 36,300 acres of land across the country in the past five days. Thousands of firefighters, along with hundreds of vehicles and more than 100 helicopters, were deployed to battle the fires in Sancheong county. *—PTI*

Transgenders in US to block passport policy change

BOSTON, 25 MARCH

When Ash Lazarus Orr went to renew his passport in early January, the transgender organiser figured it would be relatively routine. But more than two months on, Orr is waiting to get a new passport with a name change and a sex designation reflecting who he is. The delay has prevented him from travelling overseas to receive gender-affirming care this month in Ireland since he refuses to get a passport that lists an "inaccurate sex designation". After the Trump executive order, the State Department quickly stopped issuing travel documents with the "X" gender marker preferred by many nonbinary people, who don't identify as strictly male or female. The department also stopped allowing people to change the gender listed on their passport or get new ones that reflect their gender rather than their sex assigned at birth. *—PTI*

US intel heads reveal war secrets in chat with scribe

Chat among officials mistakenly included Atlantic's editor-in-chief

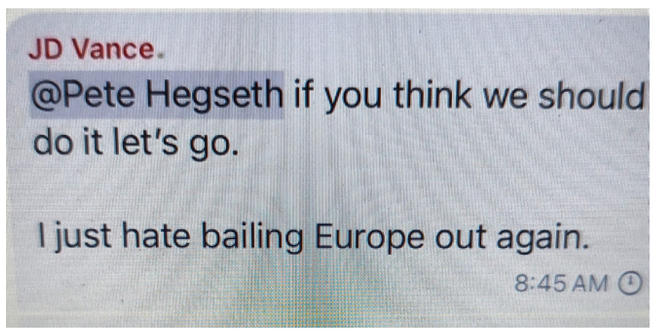
US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz created a chat group on Signal

WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH

On 11 March, when the editor-in-chief for The Atlantic received a connection request from one Michael Waltz to join a group chat with top officials of the state, he thought it was a hoax. On 15 March he received details of the attack on Yemen, two hours later it turned out to be true.

The material in the text chain "contained operational details of forthcoming strikes on Iran-backed Houthi-rebels in Yemen, including information about targets, weapons the US would be deploying, and attack sequencing", Goldberg reported in the newspaper. The leaking of highly sensitive information has raised many questions and the National Security Council said in a statement that it was looking into how a journalist's number was added to the chain in the Signal group chat which included Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, Vice-President J D Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's director of national intelligence.

Government officials have used Signal for organisational correspondence, but it is not classified and can be hacked. Privacy and tech experts say the popular end-to-end encrypted messaging and voice call app is more secure than conventional texting.



The chat's screenshots, which were posted on the website of 'The Atlantic" has Vance decrying that Europe was 'free-loading' but exposes the fragile nature of their confrontation as their business and commercial interests are deeply aligned on the same side

The incident comes as Hegseth's office has just announced a crackdown on leaks of sensitive information, including the potential use of polygraphs on defence personnel to determine how reporters have received information. US President Donald Trump denied any knowledge of it. "I don't know anything about it. You're telling me about it for the first time." He added that The Atlantic was "not much of a magazine." The US has conducted airstrikes against the Houthis since the militant group began targeting commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea in November 2023. Hegseth in his first comments on the matter attacked Goldberg as "deceitful" and a "discredited so-called journalist" without offering further explanation. In a statement late on Monday, White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said the president still has the "utmost confidence" in Waltz and the national security team. *—PTI*

UK sanctions Sri Lanka's former commanders for human abuse

COLOMBO, 25 MARCH

The UK has imposed sanctioned four Sri Lankans, including three former military commanders, who led the campaign that crushed the LTTE in 2009, for human rights violations. A UK foreign office statement on Monday said General Shavendra Silva, former Head of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces, Wasantha Karannagoda, former Navy Commander, and Jagath Jayasuriya, former Commander of the Sri Lankan Army, were among those sanctioned and subjected to UK travel bans and asset freezes.

The statement said the UK government also sanctioned Vinyagamurthy Muralidaran, the deputy leader of the LTTE who later turned a rebel of the group and became a deputy minister in the national parliament. "The UK government has imposed sanctions on 4 individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses and violations during the Sri Lanka civil war, including extrajudicial killings, torture and/or perpetration of sexual violence," the statement said.

UK government's sanctions on General Silva follow a similar action against him by the US State Department in 2020 *PHOTO: X/@NewsWireLK*

- He said the sanctions would ensure that those responsible for past human rights violations and abuses were held accountable.

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, David Lammy, said: "The UK government is committed to human rights in Sri Lanka, including seeking accountability for human rights violations and abuses which took place during the civil war, and which continue to have an impact on communities today." He said the sanctions would ensure that those responsible for past human rights violations and abuses were held accountable.

"The UK government looks forward to working with the new Sri Lankan government to improve human rights in Sri Lanka, and welcomes their commitments on national unity," Lammy said.

The UK government's sanctions on General Silva follow a similar action against him by the US State Department in 2020. In 2023, Canada sanctioned the two former presidents, Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa who led the military campaign to crush LTTE. *—PTI*

Sri Lanka MPs seek removal of jailed police chief

COLOMBO, 25 MARCH

Over a hundred MPs of the ruling National People's Power (NPP) coalition on Monday wrote to the Parliament Speaker seeking removal of the suspended Sri Lankan police chief "for bringing disrepute to the high office through his abusive conduct."

Deshabandu Tennakoon, the suspended inspector general of police, is currently in remand custody at a central provincial jail in Kandy district in connection with a shooting incident in 2023 in which an officer was killed due to allegations of custodial torture.

"We have handed a letter with 115 signatures from our MPs to the Speaker of Parliament to seek his removal for bringing disrepute to the high office through his abusive conduct," Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs Eranga Gunasekera told reporters.

Tennakoon was suspended in July 2024 from his duties by the Supreme Court, which also ordered a hearing on the legality of his appointment after receiving petitions regarding it. *—PTI*

Israeli strikes on Gaza kill 23 overnight

DEIR AL-BALAH, 25 MARCH

Palestinian medics said Israeli strikes killed at least 23 people in the Gaza Strip overnight into Tuesday.

The dead include three children and their parents, who were killed in a strike on their tent near the southern city of Khan Younis, according to Nasser Hospital, which has received a flood of dead and wounded since Israel resumed heavy bombardment of Gaza last week, shattering the ceasefire that had halted the 17-month war.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians and wounded more than 113,000, according to the Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence. Israel launched the campaign vowing to destroy Hamas after its 7 October, 2023, attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 251. Israel says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because it operates in densely populated areas. Even as civilian resistance to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Government faces, it is not clear if it will heed to a resumption of talks on ceasefire. *—PTI*

Gaza resident Amani Abu Aker holds the body of her two-year-old niece Salma, killed during an Israeli army strike, before her burial at the Baptist hospital in Gaza City *PHOTO: PTI*

Oscar-winning Palestinian beaten by Israeli settlers, held

HEBRON, 25 MARCH

Israeli authorities released an Oscar-winning Palestinian director who was detained by the army after being attacked by Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank.

Hamdan Ballal and the other directors of 'No Other Land', which looks at the struggles of living under Israeli occupation, had mounted the stage at the 97th Academy Awards in Los Angeles earlier this month when it won the award for best documentary film.

Ballal and two other Palestinians detained with him were released Tuesday afternoon from a police station in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba. Ballal had bruises on his face and blood on his clothes.

Their attorney, Lea Tsemel, said they spent the night on the floor of a military base while receiving only minimal care for their injuries from the attack.

She had earlier said they were accused of throwing stones at a young settler, allegations they deny. Palestinian residents say around two dozen settlers — some masked, some carrying guns and some in military uniforms — attacked the West Bank village of Susiya on Monday evening as residents were breaking their fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Soldiers who arrived pointed their guns at the Palestinians, while settlers continued throwing stones, they said. *—PTI*

NO END IN SIGHT

Negotiations on Ukraine war enter 3rd day in Saudi

MOSCOW, 25 MARCH

- The American and Russian negotiators held talks throughout the day on Monday in the capital of Saudi Arabia to hammer out details on a partial pause.

Even as Russian missiles continued to pound targets in Ukraine, Kremlin official Dmirty Peskov said further contacts between US and Russian officials on achieving a proposed ceasefire in Ukraine are likely to follow a round of talks Monday, a Kremlin official said on Tuesday, but no concrete plans have yet been made.

The strike on Sumy, across the border from Russia's Kursk region has risen to 101 while Russian forces launched one ballistic missile and 139 long-range strike and decoy drones into Ukraine overnight, according to the Ukrainian air force. Those attacks affected seven regions of Ukraine.

The American and Russian negotiators held talks throughout the day on Monday in the capital of Saudi Arabia to hammer out details on a partial pause in the 3-year-old war in Ukraine, a day after US officials held separate talks in Riyadh with a team from Kyiv.

It has been a struggle to reach even a limited, 30-day ceasefire, which Moscow and Kyiv agreed to in principle last week. While the White House said a partial ceasefire would include ending attacks on "energy and infrastructure", the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he would also like to see railways and ports protected.

On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the outcome of the talks in Riyadh "has been reported in the capitals" and was currently being "analyzed" by Moscow and Washington, but that the Kremlin has no plans to release any details of what was discussed to the public.

He said there were no plans of three way talks between US, Ukraine and Russia for US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin to speak. *—PTI*

Firefighters put out the fire following a Russian attack in Sumy, Ukraine on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Japan court orders dissolution of Unification Church

TOKYO, 25 MARCH

- The Japanese branch of the church had criticised the request as a serious threat to religious freedom and the human rights of its followers.

A court ordered the dissolution of the Unification Church in Japan, upholding a government request for a revocation spurred by the investigation into the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The Tokyo District Court's revocation of the church's legal status means it will lose its tax-exempt privilege and must liquidate its assets. However, the church can still appeal the decision to higher courts. The order follows a request by Japan's Education Ministry in 2023 to dissolve the influential South Korea-based sect, citing manipulative fundraising and recruitment tactics that sowed fear among followers and harmed their families.

The Japanese branch of the church had criticised the request as a serious threat to religious freedom and the human rights of its followers. The investigation into the 2022 assassination of Abe revealed decades of cozy ties between the South Korea-based church and Japan's governing Liberal Democratic Party.

The church obtained legal status as a religious organisation in Japan in 1968 amid an anti-communist movement supported by Abe's grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi. The man accused of killing Abe resented the church and blamed it for his family's financial troubles.The church, which officially calls itself the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, is the first religious group to face a revocation order under Japan's civil code. *—PTI*

IN JAIL, WAITING TRIAL

Protests on in Turkey as Oppn visits mayor

ISTANBUL, 25 MARCH

People shout slogans next to anti riot police officers during a protest in Istanbul, Turkey *PHOTO: PTI*

Even as demonstrations swelled in Turkey against what is seen as an assault of democracy, the head of Turkiye's main opposition party visited jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu on Tuesday after six nights of massive protests calling for his release.

Imamoglu, who is seen as the main challenger to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 22-year rule was arrested on March 19 on corruption charges. His arrest has been widely viewed as politically motivated and sparked demonstrations, some turning violent, across the country.

The government insists Turkey's judiciary is independent and free of political influence. Ozgur Ozel, the leader of Imamoglu's Republican People's Party, or CHP, arrived at Silivri prison, west of Istanbul, in a convoy of vehicles Tuesday morning. He is expected to brief the media on the condition of the mayor, who spent his second night in jail.

The Media and Law Studies Association, a civil society group, said eight journalists who were detained "for covering protests in Istanbul," banned by authorities, had been brought to the city's Caglayan Courthouse. Media workers' unions have condemned the arrests as an "attack on press freedoms and the people's right to learn the truth." While demonstrations across Turkey have been largely peaceful, some turned violent, with officers deploying water cannons, tear gas and pepper spray and firing plastic pellets at protesters, some of whom have hurled stones, fireworks and other objects at riot police. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said early Tuesday that police had detained 43 "provocateurs" over what he said were "vile insults" hurled at Erdogan and his family at protests. Some 1,133 protesters were detained between Wednesday and Sunday, he said earlier. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold falls for 4th day; slips by Rs 100 to settle at 90K

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Gold prices drop by Rs 100 to Rs 90,450 per 10g in national capital on Tuesday due to weak demand from jewellers and retailers, said All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity declined by Rs 100 to Rs 90,000 per 10g, marking the fourth straight day of fall. HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst of Commodities Saumil Gandhi said, prices declined amid rising USD and treasury yields after indications that President Donald Trump's next round of tariffs may be less harsh than initially anticipated. Spot gold in the international markets increased by USD 12.56 to USD 3,023.60 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 13 paise to settle at 85.74 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

The rupee snapped its seven-session rally and settled with a loss of 13 paise at 85.74 (provisional) against the USD on Tuesday, as increased demand for dollars from importers, coupled with the greenback's recovery against major currencies, weighed on the rupee. Forex traders said it reflected a shift in market sentiment towards risk aversion. At interbank foreign exchange, rupee opened at 85.59 and touched the high of 85.58 against greenback during the day. The unit later turned volatile and hit the day's low of 85.84 before ending the session at 85.74 (provisional) against the dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.02 per cent at 104.24. *—PTI*

Govt plans to stop gold monetisation scheme

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The government has decided to discontinue the Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS) starting from Wednesday in view of the evolving market conditions, the finance ministry said. However, the banks may continue their short term gold deposit schemes (STBD), ministry said on Tuesday. GMS was announced on September 15, 2015, with the objective to reduce country's reliance on the import of gold in the long run and mobilise gold held by households and institutions in the country to facilitate its use for productive purposes. Gold prices have increased by Rs 26,530 or 41.5 per cent to Rs 90,450 per 10g as of March 25, 2025 from Rs 63,920 per 10g on January 1, 2024. *—PTI*

RBI caps charges on loans up to Rs 50,000

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced new guidelines to protect small borrowers from excessive charges on loans up to Rs 50,000 under the priority sector lending (PSL) category. As of 1 April, 2025, banks cannot impose loan-related, ad hoc service, or inspection charges on these loans. The RBI has also clarified that loans against gold jewellery acquired from non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) do not qualify for priority sector status. This ensures that priority sector funds are directed towards sectors that genuinely need financial support, such as small businesses, agriculture, and weaker sections of society. To enhance transparency and accountability, banks will be required to submit detailed data on their priority sector advances on a quarterly and annual basis. Those that fail to meet their prescribed PSL targets will need to contribute to the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF). *—ANI*

India will be resilient to US tariffs: S&P

India's economy is expected to show resilience despite trade tensions arising from US

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India's economy is expected to show resilience despite trade tensions arising from US President Donald Trump's tariff threats, according to a report by S&P Global. The report said economies with a significant share of service exports, such as India and the Philippines, will be less affected by tariff measures, which are primarily imposed on goods.

The report noted that while trade frictions led by the US will impact economies across the Asia-Pacific region, domestic demand is expected to remain strong. As a result, any downward revisions to GDP forecasts in the region will likely be modest.

The report further noted that economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region remained stable through the end of 2024, with GDP gains in the fourth quarter surpassing expectations in several countries, including India, Japan, and the Philippines.

According to the report, several factors will support India's economic growth. Cooling food inflation, tax benefits announced in the Union Budget, and lower borrowing costs are expected to boost consumer spending. These factors will help sustain domestic demand and cushion the impact of external trade challenges. Auto ancillaries are looking for new markets

However, the auto component industry is facing export challenges. In addition, currency depreciation has led to demand weakness in a few Middle Eastern countries and a major slowdown in the European region, says a report by DAM Capital Advisors.

It also added that some Indian auto component manufacturers, which have lower exposure to these affected markets, are trying to mitigate the impact by focusing on adding new clients from different regions, increasing their market share.

The overall automobile industry in India is currently experiencing near-term demand weakness, with slow or declining growth in some segments. *—ANI*

Economies with a significant share of service exports will be less affected by tariff measures, which are primarily imposed on goods *PHOTO: ANI*

S&P projects India's GDP at 6.5%

New Delhi, 25 March

S&P Global Ratings cut India's GDP growth projections to 6.5 per cent for next fiscal as it expects that economies in APAC region will feel strain of rising US tariffs and pushback on globalisation. In its Economic Outlook for Asia-Pacific, S&P said despite these external strains, it expects domestic demand momentum to remain solid. "Our forecast is the same as the outcome for the previous fiscal year, but less than our earlier forecast of 6.7 per cent," S&P said. *—PTI*

Must be careful in trade pacts with US: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

PHOTO: X

India must be cautious while negotiating the proposed bilateral trade agreement with the US, as the absence of Fast Track Trade Authority in America makes any pact vulnerable to Congressional changes, economic think tank GTRI said.

It also said that the certification process allows the US to effectively re-negotiate the trade agreement after it is signed, demanding domestic legal changes, regulatory reforms, and policy shifts that could undermine India's sovereignty.

Without the Fast Track Authority in place and with the precedent of post-agreement certification allowing the US to impose additional demands, the risk of asymmetric obligations is real, he added.

The US Fast Track Trade Authority (also known as Trade Promotion Authority) is a special mechanism that allows the American President to negotiate trade agreements and present them to Congress for an up-or-down vote, without amendments or procedural delays.

However, Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said that India's major concern is the US's post-FTA certification mechanism, a practice where America unilaterally determines whether a partner country has fulfilled its obligations under the agreement. *—ANI*

BYD launched its Qin L EV sedan, a mid-sized model similar to Tesla's Model 3, and it comes at just over half the price *PHOTO: X*

CHINA'S BYD BEATS TESLA, EARNS $107B

BANGKOK, 25 MARCH

Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD logged a record USD 107B in revenue last year as its sales of battery electric and hybrid vehicles leaped 40 per cent.

The report made public by the company on Monday evening coincided with BYD's launch of its Qin L EV sedan, a mid-sized model similar to Tesla's Model 3 but coming at just over half the price.

Tesla's 2024 revenue was nearly USD 97.7B. BYD's net profit last year was about USD 5.6B, up 34 per cent from the year before.

Last week, the company announced that it was rolling out a super fast EV charging system that it said is nearly as quick as a fill up at the pumps.

BYD's Hong Kong-traded shares fell 3.2 per cent on Tuesday, despite its upbeat earnings report.

The company reported that it sold about 4.3M pure electric and hybrid vehicles last year. Nearly 29 per cent of the company's sales were in markets outside Greater China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, last year, up slightly from 27 per cent the year before.

The automaker has rapidly expanded its exports, though it has yet to try to sell in the US. *—PTI*

Markets see winning run on day 7

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

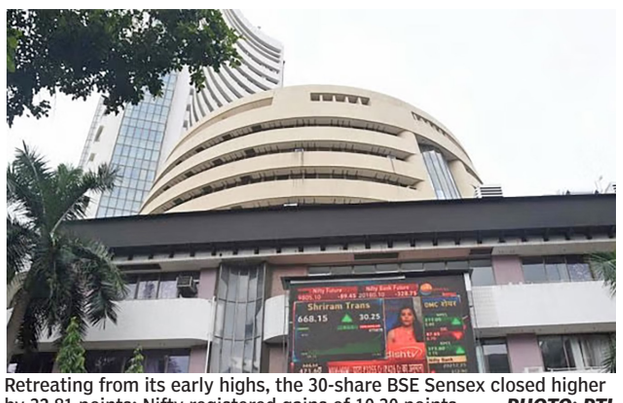
Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty eked out gains to extend their winning run to the seventh day on Tuesday, largely driven by gains in select bluechips like HDFC Bank, Infosys and Ultratech Cement.

Retreating from its early highs, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 32.81 points or 0.04 per cent at 78,017.19. As many as 20 of its components ended lower and 10 advanced. During the day, it jumped 757.31 points or 0.97 per cent to 78,741.69 but squandered most of the gains in mid-session due to profit taking.

The NSE Nifty registered gains of 10.30 points or 0.04 per cent to close at 23,668.65. Stock markets closed almost flat due to profit booking in heavyweights across sectors after recent sharp gains.

From the Sensex pack, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, HCL Tech and Tata Consultancy Services were the biggest gainers.

Zomato tanked nearly 6 per cent followed by IndusInd Bank which declined about 5 per cent. Adani Ports, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Sun Pharma also tanked. *—PTI*



Retreating from its early highs, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 32.81 points; Nifty registered gains of 10.30 points *PHOTO: PTI*

PCI URGES PM TO REVISIT UPI POLICY

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

The 180-member Payments Council of India (PCI), an industry body representing a of non-banking payment industry players, on Tuesday said has submitted a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking reconsideration of the Zero Merchant Discount Rate (ZMDR) policy for Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and RuPay debit card transactions.

The letter acknowledged the government's visionary leadership in promoting digital payments and financial inclusion. It highlighted the pressing financial sustainability concerns faced by the digital payments ecosystem because of the continued ZMDR policy, which has been in effect since January 2020, it said.

The letter pointed out that the government's Rs 1,500-crore financial incentive to offset the ecosystem's operational costs covers only a fraction of the estimated Rs 10,000-crore annual cost.

The PCI also emphasised that sustaining India's digital payments growth would require continuous investments in innovation, cyber security, merchant onboarding, compliance and IT infrastructure. To address this challenge, the industry proposed the introduction of an MDR for RuPay debit cards for all merchants and a reasonable MDR of 0.3 per cent for UPI only for large merchants, the PCI said. *—ANI*

Telecom tariff hikes to continue:

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

PHOTO: X

The regular tariff hike by the telecom operators in the country will continue in future as the companies plan to increase Average Revenue Per User (ARPU), says a report by Centrum Institutional Research.

The telecom industry has already witnessed three major tariff hikes in December 2019, November 2021 and July 2024. With rising prices, more customers are likely to shift to premium plans, leading to higher spending per user. The report said, "ARPU is surging due to deliberate pricing strategies and improving customer mix. We expect regular tariff hikes, going ahead, too."

The report also noted that India's 2G customer base is expected to shrink significantly over the next 5–6 years. Airtel has 23 per cent of its customers on 2G, while Vodafone Idea has around 40 per cent. However, with the increasing adoption of 4G and 5G, the number of 2G users is expected to become negligible.

A key trend in the industry is the migration from 2G to 4G, along with a growing number of post-paid subscribers.

This shift is improving the overall revenue per user. Additionally, data consumption is increasing, with customers opting for higher-priced data plans. *—ANI*

Jefferies says semiconductor industry is underdeveloped

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India's semiconductor industry is growing but faces significant challenges such as an underdeveloped supply chain, a shortage of specialised manufacturing talent, global competition and rapidly evolving technology, said a report by Jefferies.

The report highlighted that while India has several key advantages, including a strong engineering talent pool and government support, it must overcome hurdles to establish a competitive semiconductor ecosystem. One of the biggest challenges is the limited availability of key raw materials like silicon wafers, high-purity gases, specialty chemicals and ultrapure water.

While India has a well-developed chemical and gas manufacturing sector, particularly in regions such as Dahej in Gujarat, companies still need to enhance their capabilities to produce semiconductor-grade raw materials. The government has prioritised the development of the full semiconductor supply chain, including chemicals, gases and equipment, to reduce dependency on imports. However, there is a gap in specialised skills required for semiconductor fabrication and testing.

The report stated that companies are working on skill development, and the government is collaborating with industries and universities to create courses tailored to semiconductor manufacturing, assembly and testing. *—ANI*

Defence exports soar: Arms sales cross Rs 21 crore mark

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India's defence production has reached a record high of Rs 1.27 lakh crore in the FY 2023-24, driven by the government's "Make in India" initiative. This marks a significant 174 per cent increase from Rs 2.53 lakh crore in 2014-15.

The country's defence exports have also witnessed unprecedented growth, crossing Rs 1.27 lakh crore in FY 2023-24, expanding 30 times in a decade, with exports to over 100 countries. According to the Ministry of Defence, 65 per cent of defence equipment is now manufactured domestically, reducing dependence on foreign suppliers. Private sector contributes 21% to total defence production, fostering innovation and efficiency.

Initiatives like iDEX and SAMARTHYA have driven technological advancements in AI, cyber warfare, and indigenous weapon systems.

Government's strategic policies is encouraging private participation, technological innovation, and the development of advanced military platforms. -ANI

46% AT ENTRY LEVEL

Only 19% of women attain leadership roles

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Women's representation declines significantly at higher leadership levels as on average only around 19 per cent hold C-suite positions, says a report by TeamLease.

It said, "Women's representation declines significantly at higher leadership levels. On average, only around 19 per cent hold C-suite positions, and 46 per cent of women representation is seen in entry-level roles", highlighting a massive drop off. The report also sheds light on the unemployment rate among women, which has increased slightly from 2.9 per cent to 3.2 per cent. This suggested that women continue to struggle with job stability and securing long-term employment.

One of the key trends observed in the report is the rise in the female Labour Force Participation Rate, primarily driven by rural areas. However, urban women still face multiple challenges, including limited job opportunities, sociocultural barriers, and a lack of flexible work arrangements.

Certain industries offer better prospects for women in leadership roles. Sectors such as Consumer Services, Retail, and Education have a higher ratio of women in C-suite positions compared to entry-level roles, ranging between 64 per cent and 68 per cent. On the other hand, industries like Construction, Financial Services, and Real Estate present significant barriers, with ratio falling below 50 per cent. This highlighted the need for more inclusive policies and initiatives to support women in male-dominated industries.

Regional analysis of contractual workforce shows that Maharashtra leads with highest share of women employees at 28.7 per cent, followed by Tamil Nadu (14.2 per cent) and Karnataka (14.1 per cent). *—ANI*

Women continue to struggle with job stability and securing long-term employment *PHOTO: X*

PHOTO: X

Customer care keeps Indians on hold for 15B hrs

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

A recent report has revealed that Indian consumers spent a staggering 15 billion hours waiting to lodge customer service complaints in 2024. Despite the increasing use of AI agents and chatbots, report found that 80 per cent of consumers rely on these technologies for essential services.

The ServiceNow Customer Experience report surveyed 5,000 Indian consumers and 204 Indian customer service agents. It found that 39 per cent of consumers are kept on hold, 36 per cent are repeatedly transferred, and 34 per cent believe companies deliberately complicate the complaint process.

As a result, customer patience is wearing thin, with 89 per cent of Indian consumers willing to switch brands due to inefficient service. Furthermore, 84 per cent of consumers indicated they would leave negative review online after a poor service experience. Failure to adapt risks losing customer loyalty and being left behind in a rapidly changing market. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Would love to fly planes for a living: Glenn Phillips

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

When he is done taking superhuman catches on a cricket field, Glenn Phillips, a man of multiple interests, would love to fly planes for a living. After all, flying has always been his passion and if he had all the money in the world, the New Zealand and Gujarat Titans all-rounder would rather be a pilot than a cricketer. Speaking to PTI ahead of his maiden season with Gujarat Titans, Phillips also detailed how he uses his experience of playing a variety of sports in cricket, the hard work behind his gravity-defying catches, how playing in India has made him a better player of spin and why his fourth team in the IPL has already become his favorite one. *—PTI*

Himachal HC rejects BFI's appeal against stay

SHIMLA, 25 MARCH

Boxing Federation of India's (BFI) appeal to overturn the order to stay former sports minister Anurag Thakur's disqualification from the electoral college for the national body's polls was on Tuesday dismissed by the Himachal Pradesh High Court.BFI president Ajay Singh had challenged the high court's March 20 ruling, which reinstated Thakur's eligibility to contest elections and directed BFI to extend the nomination deadline to allow his candidature."The BFI President had appealed to the double bench to stay the single bench's order. But the court has not granted a stay. *—PTI*

New stadium for Brisbane 2032 Olympics is unveiled

BRISBANE, 25 MARCH

A 60,000-seat stadium for the Brisbane Olympics to be built in inner-city parkland has been unveiled as part of a major overhaul of planning for the 2032 Summer Games. David Crisafulli, the third premier of Queensland state in the almost four years since the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2032 Games to Brisbane, announced the latest plans on a rainy Tuesday at a Future Brisbane forum. It's been more than 1,340 days since that IOC decision in 2021, and local organizers still haven't commenced the Olympic venue construction program. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Ednaldo Rodrigues re-elected as Brazil soccer boss to 2030

DUBAI, 25 MARCH

Brazilian soccer boss Ednaldo Rodrigues was re-elected as president on Monday, 12 days after his main rival Ronaldo Nazário gave up his bid.Rodrigues received all 67 votes, a first in the history of the Brazilian Football Confederation. The celebratory speech by the 71-year-old Rodrigues described the unparalleled unity that exists within Brazilian soccer today." He will be in charge of the confederation when Brazil hosts the 2027 Women's World Cup. Rodrigues' second mandate at the CBF will officially start in April 2026 and run till 2030. He first took the job as interim president in 2021.*—PTI*

KKR, RR eye batting, bowling overhaul to bounce back

KKR camp now hopes that the spinner will find his stride

GUWAHATI, 25 MARCH

Outmuscled in their previous matches, title-holders Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals will need to make a quick course correction in every aspect when they face each other in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

The Knight Riders were beaten by seven wickets by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the tournament-opener while Sunrisers Hyderabad gave the Royals a 44-run drubbing.

The common theme in those defeats was how the seemingly powerful batting and bowling units of KKR and RR failed to fire.

While the Rajasthan outfit might offer the excuse of playing on a Hyderabad shirtfront for the malfunction of their bowling unit, the Kolkata side cover.

Apart from Sunil Narine, none of the KKR bowlers were able to contain free-flowing RCB batters, and in that, the demystification of mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy might just worry them a bit.

Even on an Eden Gardens pitch that had some grip, Chakravarthy was given a toweling by Phil Salt and Virat Kohli.

Kolkata Knight Riders' captain Ajinkya Rahane with teammates during a training session 5 *PHOTO: PTI*

KKR VS RR

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	29
KKR Won:	14
RR Won:	14
No Result:	1

KKRvs RR Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

The KKR camp now hopes that the spinner will find his stride on a Guwahati pitch that generally has some bite.

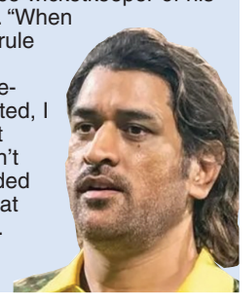
They will also keep an eye on the fitness of Anrich Nortje, who is recovering from a back strain. If the South African gets a green signal from the physios, then he will walk in for Spencer Johnson.

Similarly, KKR's middle-order batting crumbled spectacularly after skipper Ajinkya Rahane and Narine gave them a blistering start, eventually settling for a sub-par score.

Their batting pivots such as Venkatesh Iyer and Andre Russell got out, playing pre-determined cross-batted shots, and KKR will hope that they will show more game awareness in Guwahati. *—PTI*

Dhoni calls Impact Player rule part of evolution

Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was not quite convinced about the need for the Impact Player rule when it was first introduced in the IPL but now sees it as a part of T20 cricket's evolution. The 43-year-old, who remains a talismanic figure for the Chennai Super Kings despite relinquishing captaincy last year, said he does not consider himself an Impact Player as he remains the first-choice wicketkeeper of his side. "When this rule was implemented, I felt it wasn't needed at that time.



Shreyas propels PBKS to 243/5 against Gujarat

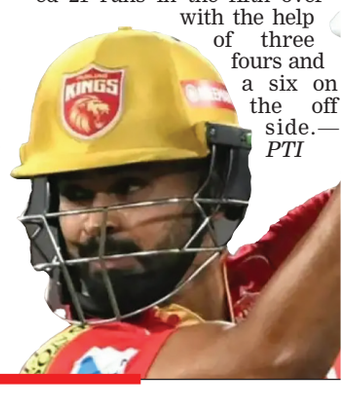
AHMEDABAD, 25 MARCH

Skipper Shreyas Iyer began his stint at Punjab Kings with a scintillating 42-ball unbeaten 97 to power his team to an imposing 243 for five against Gujarat Titans in their Indian Premier League match here on Tuesday.

Shreyas struck as many as nine sixes and five fours, but he could not get to his maiden IPL hundred, as Shashank Singh (44 off 16 balls) took 23 runs off the final over to end the PBKS innings on a high note.Shashank hit six fours and two sixes during his brilliant cameo.Earlier, caring very little for reputation, Priyansh Arya (47 off 23) went after the GT bowling from the get-go.

Arya, who was bought by PBKS for Rs 3.8 crore at the last IPL auction, clobbered Mohammed Siraj over deep square leg for his first six and followed it up with a four.Kagiso Rabada made the first breakthrough when he had Prabhsimran Singh caught in the deep, paving the way for new PBKS captain Shreyas Iyer's entry into the middle, and he started with a lovely drive on the up for a boundary before flicking the seasoned South African pacer for a six over deep square leg.

Back in the strike, the 24-year-old Arya launched into left-arm pacer Arshad Khan and collected 21 runs in the fifth over with the help of three fours and a six on the off side.— *PTI*



"We have to mix and match until we get our players back

- Lance Klusener, LSG assistant coach

"The whole year I focussed and visualised finishing game

- Ashutosh Sharma, DC batter

Nitin Menon *PHOTO: PTI*

ICC RETAINS NITIN MENON IN ELITE PANEL OF UMPIRES

DUBAI, 25 MARCH

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday included Allahudien Paleker of South Africa and England's Alex Wharf in the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires, which features Nitin Menon as the only Indian, while Jayaraman Madangopal has been promoted to the Emerging Panel.

Michael Gough and Joel Wilson will make way for the two new entrants in Palekar and Wharf.

According to BCCI sources, the 50-year-old Madangopal has been promoted to the Emerging Panel which makes him eligible to officiate in overseas Tests and ODIs. Former Tamil Nadu player Madangopal has so far officiated in one Test, 22 ODIs and 42 T20Is.

Meanwhile, Menon is ranked second behind Richard Illingworth in the Elite Panel of Umpires.

Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Umpires (2025-26): Kumar Dharmasena (Sri Lanka), Christopher Gaffaney (New Zealand), Adrian Holdstock (South Africa), Richard Illingworth (England), Richard Kettleborough (England), Nitin Menon (India), Allahuddien Paleker (South Africa), Ahsan Raza (Pakistan), Paul Reiffel (Australia), Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid (Bangladesh), Rodney Tucker (Australia), Alex Wharf (England). *—PTI*

Cantlay's clutch birdie gives Atlanta 1-0 TGL lead

PALM BEACH GARDENS, 23 MARCH

Patrick Cantlay came up clutch with the putter again by making a 6-foot birdie putt to give the Atlanta Drive a 6-5 victory over New York and a 1-0 lead in the best-of-3 finals of the TGL indoor golf league's inaugural season.

Xander Schauffele had a chance to send the match to a shootout with a 6-foot birdie putt, but it caught the right edge and lipped out.

The second final match of the high-tech league is Tuesday night, followed immediately by a third match if necessary.

The score was tied at 2 after nine holes of alternate shots. Cameron Young made a 9-foot eagle putt to give New York a 4-2 lead because Atlanta challenged with the hammer, making the hole worth two points. Billy Horschel of Atlanta returned the favor, making an 11-foot birdie putt when New York threw the hammer.

Young won the 13th hole when Justin Thomas of Atlanta made a bogey, only for Horschel to hit his tee shot on a par 3 to 5 feet for a conceded birdie. *—PTI*

MIAMI OPEN

Iga battles past Elina to reach QFs

MIAMI, 25 MARCH

Iga Swiatek cruised past Elina Svitolina in a lackluster performance from both players at the Miami Open, winning 7-6(5), 6-3. In a match marked by errors, the Pole showed greater composure to overcome a tough opponent like the Ukrainian. The 5-time Grand Slam champion once again displayed her consistency, reaching the quarter-finals in 17 of her last 18 WTA 1000 appearances. She also notched her 110th win in this tournament category. For a place in the semi-finals, she will face the tournament's surprise package: 19-year-old Alexandra Eala, who advanced without playing after Paula Badosa's injury.

De Minaur ends Fonseca's run in thriller

Alex de Minaur secured a record-tying 17th match win of the season in a physical battle against #NextGenATP star Joao Fonseca on Monday at the Miami Open presented by Itau.Tied with Felix Auger-Aliassime for the most wins this year, the Australian ended Fonseca's run at the ATP Masters 1000 event with a thrilling 5-7, 7-5, 6-3 victory. Raucous Brazilian fans created a carnival feel inside the Stadium court, prompting De Minaur to sign the camera lens, 'Rio Open :)' after the 2-hour, 31-minute match. *—PTI*

India and B'desh play out a goalless draw

SHILLONG, 25 MARCH

India and Bangladesh played out a goalless draw in their 2027 AFC Asian Cup qualifying round match here on Tuesday.

Bangladesh were slightly the better side in the first half with more attacking moves and corner kicks, but without any clear-cut chances. India put up a much better performance in the next 45 minutes, putting Bangladesh under a lot of pressure, but the chances were few and far between. In the 12th minute, India goalkeeper Vishal Kaith committed a mistake as he kicked the ball into an opposition player. Mohammed Ridoy pounced on the deflection and sent a left footer from an angular position into the open net but Subhasish Bose produced a goal-line clearance. India's best chance came in the 31st minute, but Udanta Singh's header off a Liston Colaco cross from the left failed to beat Bangladesh goalie Mitul Marma. In a dominant second-half display for India, Bose made an audacious long-range effort which beat the Bangladesh goalkeeper all the way but missed the left corner of the net by inches in the 68th minute. Five minutes later, Farukh Choudhary's right footer went just wide after a deflection from a Bangladeshi defender. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sunil Kumar to compete in bronze medal match

AMMAN, 25 MARCH

Indian wrestler Sunil Kumar will compete in the bronze medal match against China's Jiaxin Huang after losing in the semifinals of the 87kg Greco-Roman bout in the Asian Championship, here on Tuesday.

Sunil, a silver medallist in 2019 who is looking to regain some of his old magic, had registered a 10-1 victory over Tajikistan's Sukhrob Abdulkhaev in the quarterfinal. He scored all of his points in the second period.

However, it was Iran's Yasin Yazdi who marched into the 87kg final with a 3-1 victory over Sunil in the semifinal clash.

Sagar Thakran won his 77kg qualifications bout but lost 10-0 in the quarterfinal to Jordan's Amro Sadeh. With a 4-point throw from par terre, Sadeh booked a place in the semifinals.

Sunil Kumar *PHOTO: PTI*

After this defeat, Sagar's fate depended on the semifinal result of his rival.

Umesh (63kg) lost the qualification but may get a repechage if his rival wins the semifinals later in the day.

Nitin (55kg) and Prem (130kg) were ousted in the qualification round. *—PTI*

Smriti, Deepti retain their spots in ICC rankings

DUBAI, 25 MARCH

India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma held on to their third positions respectively in the latest ICC Women's T20I batter and bowlers' rankings issued here on Tuesday.

Besides Mandhana, no other Indian is in the top-10 with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur placed 11th position, Jemimah Rodrigues ranked 15th and Shafali Verma a rung below.

The batters' list is led by Australia's Beth Mooney, followed by teammate Tahlia McGrath.

Mooney increased her lead at the top following scores of 75 and 70 against New Zealand. Phoebe Litchfield gained three places to move to 22nd overall following an innings of 32 in the second clash with the White Ferns. *—PTI*

WORLD CUP 2026

England underwhelms against Latvia in qualifier win

LONDON, 25 MARCH

Reece James scored a brilliant free kick and Eberechi Eze grabbed his maiden international goal as England beat Latvia 3-0 in a World Cup qualifier at Wembley Stadium on Monday.

James, making his first start in 2 1/2 years, curled a 25-meter free kick into the top corner after 37 minutes. The goal was his first in 18 England appearances and broke down a stuffy Latvia side.

Reece James

Midway through the second half, with the home crowd starting to get restless, young midfielder Morgan Rogers combined well with Declan Rice to pave the way for a Harry Kane tap-in.

Then Eze cut in from the right and his shot hit the back of the net after taking a slight deflection.

England is the hot favorite to win Europe Group K and qualify for the 2026 World Cup. New coach Thomas Tuchel, in just his second game in charge, was content with the result if not the performance against a side 136 places behind it in the FIFA rankings.

The German praised the returning James, a player he knows from his time managing Chelsea, and said he was happy with the way things have gone in his first two matches. *—PTI*

Sepp & Platini acquitted in FIFA graft case

Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini won again in court Tuesday and now lead 2-0 in trial verdicts against Swiss federal prosecutors. The former FIFA president and former UEFA president were acquitted for a second time on charges of fraud, forgery, mismanagement, and misappropriation of more than $2 million of FIFA money in 2011. *—PTI*

CONCACAF Gold Cup Opening Match on 14 June

MADRID, 25 MARCH

Concacaf has announced that the opening match of the 2025 Concacaf Gold Cup the 18th edition of the Confederation's flagship men's national team competition has been awarded to SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. The match on Saturday, 14 June, will feature the 2025 Concacaf Nations League champions, Mexico, who will seek to defend their Gold Cup title after lifting the trophy at SoFi Stadium in 2023.

The match will see Gold Cup action return to SoFi Stadium after hosting the 2023 Final, which saw Mexico defeat Panama 1-0 in front of a sold-out crowd. Mexico holds a record nine men's Gold Cup titles, followed by the United States with seven and Canada with one. SoFi Stadium, a FIFA World Cup 2026 host venue, is home to the NFL's Los Angeles Chargers and Los Angeles Rams and has hosted some of the world's most important sporting and entertainment events, including the Gold Cup, Nations League Finals, Copa America, Super Bowl LVI, the 2023 College Football Playoff National Championship, and Wrestle Mania, among others. *—PTI*

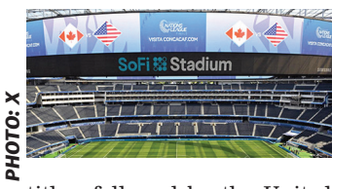


PHOTO: X